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# TRADE UNIONISM



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THE SOCIAL WORKER AND  
MODERN CHARITY

By WILLIAM FOSS & JULIUS WEST

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# TRADE UNIONISM

BY

C. M. LLOYD

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*REVISED AND ENLARGED*

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## • PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION

IN revising this book for a new edition, I have made comparatively few alterations in the original text, and these only where it seemed obviously necessary. The final chapter, however, was too out of date to stand, and I have excised it. Three new chapters (IX, X, and XI) describe and criticise the main developments during and after the war. The reader, who is studying the subject for the first time, may find it most convenient to follow Chapter II with Chapter IX, and Chapter V with Chapter X, so as to keep a chronological order in his Trade Union history.

I have to thank Mr. R. H. Tawney and Mr. R. Page Arnot for reading my proofs and for making various criticisms and suggestions.

C. M. LLOYD.

*London, March 1921.*

## PREFACE TO FIRST EDITION

THIS book does not purport to be a purely elementary treatise. Nor, of course, is it an exhaustive study of Trade Unionism. The compression of so vast a theme into so small a compass is bound to result in many things being left unsaid and in an all too brief treatment of many important subjects. I hope, however, that despite its shortcomings, it may yet succeed in giving the reader a clear idea of what the Trade Union movement is, and in putting him upon inquiry as to what it ought to be.

I am deeply in the debt of Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Webb, not only in common with all the world, for their standard works — *The History of Trade Unionism* and *Industrial Democracy*—but also for advice and suggestions in the writing of these pages. Others whom I have to thank particularly for valuable criticism or for information, are Mr. Frederic Keeling, Mr. G. D. H. Cole, Mr. W. Stephen Sanders, and my wife, besides a host of Trade Unionist friends—not least those of France and Belgium, who have given me the greatest

possible assistance on my visits of investigation in their countries.

The bibliography in the Appendix contains, as will be seen, only the most modern books. Those who wish to consult earlier works will do well to refer to the elaborate bibliographies in *Industrial Democracy* and *The History of Trade Unionism*.

C. M. LLOYD.

July 1914.

*Postscript.*—The whole of this volume was completed shortly before the outbreak of the European War. When peace comes, there will doubtless be many changes to record in the Trade Union world; but at present it would be a waste of time to guess at them. I have, therefore, not attempted to alter anything that I have written. An account of how Trade Unionism stood at the end of the old epoch may perhaps prove of some value when the new epoch begins.

C. M. L.

December 1914.

# CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I. TRADE UNION HISTORY . . .	1
II. TRADE UNION HISTORY ( <i>continued</i> ) . . .	19
III. TRADE UNION ORGANISATION . . .	47
IV. THE FUNCTION OF TRADE UNIONISM . . .	76
V. TRADE UNION REGULATIONS . . .	91
VI. TRADE UNION METHODS . . .	119
VII. TYPES OF CONTINENTAL TRADE UNIONISM . . .	165
VIII. THE PROBLEMS OF TRADE UNIONISM . . .	188
IX. TRADE UNIONS IN THE WAR AND AFTER . . .	212
X. THE PROGRESS OF ORGANISATION . . .	235
XI. THE GOAL OF TRADE UNIONISM . . .	251
APPENDIX: TRADE UNION MEMBERSHIP, 1919-20 . . .	282
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY . . .	283
INDEX . . .	287

# TRADE UNIONISM

## CHAPTER I

### TRADE UNION HISTORY

The Beginnings of Trade Unionism—The Combination Acts—Francis Place—"Syndicalism" and Chartism, 1829-1842.

ASSOCIATIONS of workmen, of one type or another, can no doubt be traced far back into history. But it would be a waste of ingenuity to try to connect the scattered and ephemeral combinations of a dim past with Trade Unions as we know them to-day. Nor is the modern Trade Union, as it was once fashionable to suppose, a lineal descendant of the mediæval Craft Guild. A Trade Union is a permanent combination of wage-earners for the protection or improvement of their conditions of employment.<sup>1</sup> The Guilds, which survive to-day in the City Companies of London, were bodies entirely

<sup>1</sup> Technically, an association of employers may be a Trade Union, since the statutory definition in the Trade Union Acts includes "combinations for regulating the relations between workmen and masters," and even "for regulating the relations between masters



dominated by the master craftsmen; their members were masters, or journeymen on their way to become masters; there was no question of a wage-earning class attempting to protect itself against capitalist employers.

The rise of Trade Unionism in the eighteenth century was due to the change which had already begun in the organisation of industry. The great bulk of workers were more and more ceasing to be independent producers; for as industry enlarged, and it wanted more capital to start in business, the journeyman, unable to accumulate enough, sank steadily into the position of a permanent wage-earner. This process was not merely the result of the introduction of machinery and the factory,—the Industrial Revolution of the latter half of the eighteenth century. It was, of course, enormously affected by that; but it had begun long before. Thus, in 1720, we have Tailors' Unions in London agitating for higher wages and shorter hours, and earlier still, the woolcombers and weavers in the West "confederating how to incorporate themselves into a club"; while combinations both of the framework knitters and the Sheffield cutlers preceded the Industrial Revolution.

and masters." But its ordinary usage is confined to workmen (including such salaried public servants as school teachers and some classes of clerical or other brain workers, etc.), and it will be used in no other sense in this book.

Other notable instances of eighteenth-century combinations are found amongst hatters, cordwainers, curriers, brushmakers, basketmakers, calico-printers, cotton-spinners, coopers, sailmakers, coachmakers, smiths, bricklayers, carpenters, though many of these, in their original form, were more or less isolated 'trade clubs' of a peculiarly exclusive nature, to whom such phrases as 'the solidarity of labour' or the 'Trade Union Movement' would have meant nothing at all.<sup>1</sup> These artisans' clubs, indeed, were not engaged in that life-and-death struggle which characterises later periods of Trade Unionism; for their members did not come from the most oppressed classes; they were, in fact, the aristocrats of the working-class world. Among the labourers, as distinct from the skilled craftsmen, there was no attempt at organisation.

The first noticeable effect of the Industrial Revolution is to drive the workers to Parliament for protection against the debasement of their standard of life. Trade after trade is found appealing to the

<sup>1</sup> Interesting light is thrown on some of these early Unions by the papers of Francis Place. Place himself in 1790 joined the "Breeches Makers' Benefit Society . . . for the support of the members when sick and to bury them when dead." This club, like many others, was organised as a benefit club, but its real object was that of "supporting the members in a strike for wages." The Breeches Makers had collected about £250 by 1793, when they struck and were promptly defeated. Place reorganised them presently as a Tontine Sick Club.

House of Commons to fix the wages on which the God of Profit was levying a steadily increasing toll. The principle of the regulation of industry by the legislature was not new — indeed, it had been an accepted policy for many generations. But what was new was the rapid and revolutionary change that was coming over public opinion—the opinion, that is, of the classes who formed the House of Commons. From 1753 onwards, the history of the workmen's appeals for assistance is a long record of rebuffs, with a very occasional exception, as for instance in the Spitalfields Acts of 1765 and 1773, which empowered the justices to fix and enforce rates of wages for the silk-weavers.<sup>1</sup>

From the outset, the influence of the manufacturers, as was natural, bore heavily upon Parliament, and when in 1776 this influence was reinforced by Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, from which it appeared that the creed of unrestricted exploitation was really a new gospel for humanity, the day of paternalism was gone beyond recall.

By the end of the century, the last remnants of the old practice of appealing to Parliament in industrial disputes were swept away, and the dread and contempt, in which the ruling classes held

<sup>1</sup> It is to be observed that these Acts were not passed by Parliament of its own volition, but only after serious riots.

the workmen, was crystallised into the Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800. These Acts, the most stringent of their kind since the Statutes of Labourers four centuries earlier, expressly prohibited all combinations whatsoever. True, they purported to affect masters as well as men, but in this respect they were a dead letter, for no employers' combination ever appears to have been molested.

It is interesting to note that the French Parliament itself had already taken a similarly drastic step eight years previously, in the middle of the great Revolution. In 1791 the Constituent Assembly, drunk with its new-found 'political' liberty, passed without debate the famous Le Chapelier Law, which forbade the formation of "any sort of combination of citizens of the same profession or trade," as being fundamentally opposed to the constitution. No body of persons might appoint officers or keep a register of membership, or hold discussions or pass resolutions, under penalties ranging from a fine of 500 francs to being punished for sedition "with the utmost rigour of the law." A few months later followed another law, expressly forbidding all combinations of agricultural workmen for the purpose of raising or fixing wages, while in 1796, under the Directory, the paper-makers were actually forbidden by law to leave their work

except after giving satisfactory proof of sickness or infirmity.<sup>1</sup>

The Combination Acts mark the lowest pitch of degradation to which the English working class ever fell. It is true that from the fourteenth century onwards there were always statutes in force against coalitions of workmen; amply reinforced, whenever necessary, by the Common Law doctrine of 'restraint of trade,' so that the Acts of 1799 and 1800 were not a new departure. But they were far more comprehensive than anything hitherto, and their application was more rigorous, whilst at the same time the workman was deprived of the protection by Parliament, which former statutes had not interfered with. During the first quarter of the nineteenth century the history of Labour is a long record of relentless persecution by the employers, of angry reprisals by the workmen, and of savage sentences in the Courts. Place tells us that "the suffering of persons employed in the cotton manufacture were beyond credibility; they were drawn into combinations, betrayed, prosecuted, convicted, sentenced, and monstrously severe punishments inflicted on them; they were reduced to and kept in the most wretched

<sup>1</sup> Repressive legislation of this character was continued under Napoleon I., under the Restored Monarchy, under Louis Philippe, and under the Second Empire. Strikes remained illegal right down to 1864, and it was not until twenty years later that the elementary rights of Trade Unionism were recognised.

state of existence. . . . Justice was entirely out of the question; the working men could seldom obtain a hearing before a magistrate—never without impatience and insult; and never could they calculate on even an approximation to a rational conclusion. . . . Could an accurate account be given of proceedings, of hearings before magistrates, trials at Sessions and in the Court of King's Bench, the gross injustice, the foul invective and terrible punishments inflicted would not, after a few years have passed away, be credited on any but the best of evidence."

Some of these judicial savageries and their authors have obtained a lasting notoriety. In 1810 Sir John Sylvester, Common Serjeant of London, known significantly as 'Bloody Black Jack,' condemned nineteen printers employed on *The Times* newspaper to terms of imprisonment varying from nine months to two years, for "combining and conspiring together maliciously to injure their masters and employers by quitting their work on account of their demands for an increase of wages not being acceded to." In passing sentence, this ornament of the Bench harangued the prisoners as though they had been parricides, observing that "the frequency of such crimes among men of your class of life, and their mischievous and dangerous tendency to ruin the fortunes of those employers which a principle of

gratitude and self-interest should induce you to support, demand of the law that a severe example should be made of those persons who shall be convicted of such daring and flagitious combinations, in defiance of public justice and in violation of public order." A few years later seven scissor-grinders of Sheffield were thrown into gaol for three months merely for belonging to a society called the 'Misfortune Club,' which gave out-of-work benefit and tried to keep up the customary rate of wages.

In 1818 occurred the monstrous case of the Bolton Weavers. A number of delegates had met in a perfectly orderly fashion, actually at the suggestion of certain of their masters, and decided to demand an advance of wages. As a result three of them were arrested and received sentences of one and two years' imprisonment for the crime of conspiracy, despite the fact that they were supported at the trial by the employers!

Nevertheless, the Combination Laws by no means crushed out Trade Unionism. Combinations still persisted, often in the shape of secret clubs, with fearful oaths and rites, sometimes, where the employers raised no objections, more or less openly. The artisans especially in London and other towns were not so hard hit, and at the time of the repeal in 1824 there were trade societies, often

quite powerful, existing in practically all the chief handicrafts.<sup>1</sup>

One other strange fact must be recorded. There was, during the whole twenty-five years of the Combination Acts' operation, no popular movement for their repeal; the patient labours of Place and Hume were for the most part carried out in the face of a sullen apathy among the working classes. This indifference is no doubt attributable to a variety of causes. There was the general lack of organisation, without which, as anyone who is concerned with large bodies of men is well aware, it is difficult to maintain, or even to create, lasting enthusiasm. Moreover, the absence of communications prevented widespread and accurate knowledge of what was happening. The persecuted cotton operatives in Lanarkshire had but little inkling how nearly their sufferings were paralleled by those of the miners of Northumberland, the calico-printers of Lancashire, or even the cabinet-makers and other skilled journeymen of London. The very poverty of the mass of the people, too, was a bar to effective revolt, and when, in the exhaustion and misery following the

<sup>1</sup> The London coopers actually formed a Union in 1821—the 'Philanthropic Society of Coopers,' which has possessed a continuous existence ever since. The master coopers of that day do not seem to have cherished any hostility to combinations, for they had met their journeymen in 1813, and again in 1816, in conference, and agreed upon a list of prices. •



Peace of 1816, wages fell below subsistence level, the strikes of starving serfs that broke out here and there were only too obviously foredoomed to failure. Finally, in 1819, came the atrocious 'Six Acts,' chastising the people with scorpions where the Combination Acts had chastised them with whips, and the working-class leaders were driven to seek the salvation of the popular liberties in larger political reforms.

It was to Francis Place, the tailor of Charing Cross, more than to any other man, that the workmen owed the removal of the ban on Trade Unionism. In 1814 he began his task of collecting evidence, enlisting the sympathies of politicians and economists as well as of Trade Unionists, and laying his plans for the repeal of the Combination Acts. At last in 1824 a Select Committee was appointed by Parliament, with Joseph Hume as chairman, and Place in the background pulling the wires and marshalling and coaching the witnesses. The evidence was so overwhelming that the Committee, despite the prejudices and animosity against the workmen with which it had started, reported strongly in favour of complete freedom of combination, and a Bill to repeal the Acts and legalise trade societies ran through Parliament without any opposition.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "An Act to repeal the Laws relative to the Combination of Workmen; and for other Purposes therein mentioned" (1824). 5 Geo. IV. c. 95.

The immediate effect was an enormous crop of new Unions, with strikes, lock-outs and violent disturbances. In the next year the House of Commons appointed another Committee of Inquiry, shamelessly packed by the Government and the employers, who apparently intended to use it as a cloak under which to introduce a new Bill for the complete destruction of Trade Unionism. This danger was averted again by the skill and energy of Place, now warmly seconded by the Unionists all over the country. The testimony of the working-class witnesses, which was got in in the teeth of bitter opposition, finally overbore that of the masters, and the result was a fairly satisfactory compromise in the shape of an Act, which, despite certain defects, did effectually secure the right of industrial combination.<sup>1</sup>

• Place was curiously mistaken in his prophecy as to the effects of the new law. He believed that the repeal of the Combination Acts would mean the disappearance of Trade Unions, which “are but defensive measures resorted to for the purpose of counteracting the offensive ones of the masters.” As

<sup>1</sup> “An Act to repeal the Laws relating to the Combination of Workmen, and to make other Provisions in lieu thereof” (1825), 6 Geo. IV. c. 129. The Act of 1824 had removed all criminal liability of combinations for advance of wages or alteration of hours of work, and even apparently legalised violence and intimidation. The 1825 Act left the immunity from criminal liability, but created the two new offences of “molesting” and “obstructing.”

a matter of fact, the result was a triumphant burst of combinations, some local and for immediate objects (such as higher wages, shorter hours, earlier closing of shops), others of a national scope, like the Steam Engine Makers' Society, and the Friendly Society of Operative House Carpenters and Joiners of Great Britain. Several Labour papers, too, were started in 1825, of which the most important, *The Trades Newspaper and Mechanics' Weekly Journal* (price 7d.), lasted for several years.

These high hopes and enthusiasms, however, were but short-lived ; for hardly was the new Act on the Statute Book when the great financial crash of 1825 brought industry almost to a standstill and ushered in four years of black disaster.

We now enter on the most revolutionary period in the history of English Trade Unionism. It was the day of the "Trades Union," of doctrines and tactics which bear a remarkable likeness to those of the French *Confédération Générale du Travail* or of the Industrial Unionists in America to-day. In 1829 the Lancashire Cotton Spinners launched a large scheme of national organisation, known as 'The Grand General Union of the United Kingdom,' and including all male spinners and piecers. This was followed almost immediately by another society with an equally high-sounding title, The National Associa-

tion for the Protection of Labour. This federation presently enrolled about 150 different Unions, with 100,000 members, in the textile, metal and other industries, and published a sevenpenny weekly journal, *The Voice of the People*. In, less than two years, however, both the 'Grand General' and the 'National Association' had dwindled into insignificance, and the Builders' Union became the cynosure of all eyes. This militant society, known as 'The Trades Union,' embraced all sections of the building industry, and was distinguished by an elaborate ritual, with startling oaths and secret ceremonies. In 1832 it spread rapidly through Lancashire and the Midlands, and by the following summer found itself in violent disputes in Liverpool and elsewhere. The employers made a vigorous and united attack on it. Their chief weapon was the 'presentation of the document'<sup>1</sup>—a demand that

<sup>1</sup> The 'document' has frequently been used in succeeding periods. Its latest appearance was in January 1914, when the master builders of London locked out all their workmen who refused to sign an agreement to work with non-Unionists. This agreement ran as follows:—"I agree, if employed by you, to peacefully work with my fellow-employees (engaged either in your direct employment or in that of any sub-contractor) whether they are members of a Trade Society or not, and I agree that I will not quit your employment because any of my fellow-employees is or is not a member of any Trade Society; and I also agree that if I commit any breach of this agreement I shall be subject to a fine of 20s., and I agree that the amount of such fine may be deducted from any wages which may be due to me."

the men should sign an agreement renouncing membership of the Union, on pain of being locked out. The Builders' Union, ground between the upper and the nether millstones of the masters' opposition and its own internal dissensions, soon fell to pieces, and the astonished public was confronted with a still more fearful bugbear in the shape of the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union.

It is at this point that Robert Owen, already famous as educationist, factory reformer, and father of the Labour Exchange Bazaars and other socialistic schemes, makes his brief but momentous incursion into the Trade Union world.

Owen's doctrines appeared just to fit the needs of the time. Manhood suffrage had not been won by the Reform Act, and the working classes were bitterly disappointed at the failure of their political efforts. Owen offered them a magnificent scheme by which they might emancipate themselves. It was, in effect, a sort of Syndicalism, with the various trades organised in associations or parochial lodges, and united at the same time through delegates to a Grand National Council. Each Trade Union or Company was to be an independent unit, controlling its own industry throughout the country, excluding commercial competition and destined finally to supersede the State as well as the capitalist.

"We have long since discovered," he said, "that,

as long as master contends with master, no improvement, either for man or master, will be possible: there is no other alternative, therefore, but national companies for every trade. . . . Thus all those trades which relate to clothing shall form a company—such as tailors, shoemakers, hatters, milliners and mantua-makers; and all the different manufacturers shall be arranged in a similar way; communications shall pass from the various departments to the grand national establishment in London.” Owen, however, though he was as anti-parliamentary as any modern Syndicalist, did not contemplate violence as the method by which the Promised Land was to be reached. The notion of militancy, based on an uncompromising avowal of the Class Struggle, came mainly from William Benbow, a shoemaker, book-seller and coffee-house keeper, who was at this time well known as one of the extremists of the ‘National Union of the Working Classes,’<sup>1</sup> and later became prominent in the Chartist movement. He advocated a general strike; the whole working class would proclaim a ‘holiday month’ and lay down its tools.

<sup>1</sup> The National Union of the Working Classes and Others was a development of the Metropolitan Trades Union, which in its turn had come from Owen’s ‘British Association for promoting Co-operative Knowledge.’ As the National Union became more and more democratic and political, Owen drifted out of connection with it, though many of his friends and disciples (including Benbow himself) were members.

This general strike was not to be an insurrection; a simple 'passive resistance' would suffice. The holding up of all labour for a month, or even a week, would be a good lesson; while the workers amused themselves with walks in the fields or the streets, there would be no bills of exchange honoured; business would be at a standstill; the *London Gazette* would contain long lists of bankruptcies, the whole machinery of government would be thrown into confusion; and link by link the chain, which binds society together, would be loosened by the mere fact of the poor folding their arms against the rich.

Intoxicated with these ideas, the Trade Unionists embarked on their brief spell of revolutionary activities. The Grand National Consolidated Trades Union of Great Britain and Ireland was founded at the beginning of 1834, and in a few weeks it had enrolled something between half a million and a million members, including adherents from the most diverse industries—from chimney-sweeps to washerwomen, from Belfast cabinetmakers to Perthshire ploughmen. The avowed object of this leviathan Union was a general strike in all industries, but it found itself from the outset plunged into small sectional disputes all over the country, which were ruinously costly to the Union, and in which the workers were almost invariably worsted. In March

a heavy blow was dealt it by the conviction of the "six Dorchester labourers." The amazing development of the Trades Union had not unnaturally struck the utmost alarm into the propertied classes—an alarm enhanced by the fantastic rites and secret oaths with which the workmen embellished their proceedings. The authorities, therefore, at the end of February, were only too glad to pounce on certain innocent and respectable farm labourers, who had established a branch in the village of Tolpuddle for the main purpose of raising their wages from 7s. to 10s. a week. They were treated with the utmost brutality, charged with administering unlawful oaths, and punished with the outrageous sentence of seven years' transportation.

This judicial atrocity rallied for the moment the flagging energies of the Grand National, and protests, petitions and demonstrations were organised on behalf of the convicted men. But in a few weeks there were more unsuccessful and expensive strikes, accompanied by serious internal dissensions in the Union. By midsummer the Grand National was rapidly falling to pieces, and in August Owen converted it into The British and Foreign Consolidated Association of Industry, Humanity, and Knowledge, which was to take effective measures to reconcile the masters and operatives throughout the kingdom, and presently to inaugurate a New Moral World!



The collapse of the Grand National was not a death-blow to Trade Unionism, but it left it very sore and sick. Beaten on the industrial field, the workmen began to look again towards political action. The Anti-Corn Law League and the Chartist Associations were now absorbing many thousands of those who had not long before marched so confidently under the 'Syndicalist' banner. In the dark years from 1837 to 1842, Chartism completely overshadows Trade Unionism. Though, of course, a great number of Trade Unionists took part in their individual capacity in the Chartist agitation, the Unions as such seem to have had no connection with it, and we find Fergus O'Connor in 1846 actually denouncing the 'trades of Great Britain' for their criminal apathy. From 1843 onwards, indeed, there was a very noticeable change in the Trade Unionist mind. The troublesome child, which had made itself the terror of society, now began "to be a good boy"—and incidentally to manifest new signs of vitality and growth.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The potters, cotton-spinners, miners, printers, flint-glass makers, tailors, and shoemakers were all founding or reorganising their Unions at this time. And before long the Steam Engine Makers, Masons, Bookbinders, and other societies had begun to establish libraries, classes and journals.

## CHAPTER II

### TRADE UNION HISTORY (*continued*)

Rise of the Modern Trade Unions and the Struggle for the Trade Union Charter—The 'New Unionism' and the Rise of the Labour Party—The Taff Vale and Osborne Cases—The Labour Unrest and the Growth of 'Syndicalism.'

NOTHING shows more significantly the changed spirit of the Trade Unions than the attempt which was made in 1845 at uniting various trades in a national organisation. Owenism was "dead and damned," and the new body was to be not a revolutionary 'Trades Union,' but a general federation of 'Trade Unions, whose object was to "protect the interests and promote the well-being of the associated trades by mediation, arbitration and legal proceedings, and by promoting all measures, social, political and educational, which are intended to improve the condition of the labouring classes."<sup>1</sup> The National

<sup>1</sup> Even more significant was the way in which a number of the chief Unions held aloof from it, despite its mild programme. "Past experience has taught us," said the Manchester Stone Masons bitterly, "that we have had General Union enough."

Association of United Trades for the Protection of Labour, as it was called, included a fair number of adherents, and did some useful work; but the fresh trade depression, which began in 1845, and the resulting crop of strikes and internal dissensions reduced it within a few years to impotence. •

The new spirit was apparent, too, in the zeal for education, which produced a number of Trade Union libraries, classes, and monthly or weekly journals, and, still more, in the general attitude to the strike. Distaste for and denunciation of striking became the vogue, and already in 1843 and 1846 we find the Stone-Masons and the Ironmoulders taking away the right to declare strikes from their local branches. In place of the strike, it was held, the only satisfactory method of improving the workman's position was the limitation of the supply of labour; for the Trade Union leaders had now accepted the Wages Fund Theory of the economists, which taught them that, since the amount to be paid in wages was a fixed dividend, the only way to increase the quotient was to decrease the divisor—their own numbers.

This change in ideas and policy, tame as it may seem in many respects and mistaken as it certainly was in its economic basis, yet allowed the Unions to turn their energies to the problems of organisation and to lay the foundations of the great societies of to-day. All through the eighteen-forties the move-

ment for closer union in the engineering industry was gaining ground, and in 1851 most of the competing sections of engineers, machinists, steam engine makers, smiths, millwrights and patternmakers were welded into one great Union under the name of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers. This amalgamation did not solve all internal difficulties of overlapping and competition of crafts, but it was a remarkable achievement at the time. With its elaborate constitution and systematised friendly benefits, its membership of 11,800, and its contribution of 1s. a week, it seemed portentous both to the employers and to the Labour world. And the great lock-out of engineers in 1852, with the support received from the Christian Socialists and the public interest aroused in the newspapers, only served to enhance its prestige.<sup>1</sup>

The example of the A.S.E. was closely followed in 1860 by the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners, and in 1866 by the Amalgamated Society of Tailors and Tailoresses, and in almost every other trade, even if its model was not exactly copied, it exercised a profound influence.

In the comparatively quiet times of the 'fifties and early 'sixties, there was a steady growth of membership and of funds in the Trade Union movement.

<sup>1</sup> For relations between Christian Socialism and Trade Unionism see the Webbs' *History of Trade Unionism* and also *Christian Socialism, 1848-1854*, by C. E. Raven (Macmillan, 1920).

In particular the important organisations of the cotton operatives in Lancashire and of the miners, under the leadership of Alexander Macdonald, were emerging into prominence. This same period, too, witnessed the rise of Trades Councils, or local federations of Trade Unions. Such Councils were already in existence before 1860 in Liverpool, Sheffield, Edinburgh and Glasgow. The London Trades Council was formed in 1860, a development of the weekly delegate meetings which had been held to assist the building operatives in the great lock-out of 1854, and within a very short time, supported as it was by all the strongest Unions in the Metropolis and the ablest of their officials, it became one of the most important organisations in the Labour world.

About the middle 'sixties this quietude begins to be disturbed, and during the next few years we see the Trade Union movement recovering much of the old solidarity and class-conscious, aggressive spirit of Owen's day. The employers, alarmed by the growing strength of the Unions, began a regular campaign of lock-outs. At the same time they gained the willing assistance of the lawyers in prosecuting their workmen under the iniquitous Master and Servant Acts. As the law then stood, an employer who broke a contract of service was merely liable to pay

damages. The workman's penalty for breach of contract (*i.e.* for a simple refusal to work) was three months' imprisonment, without the option of a fine. Even his trial was often a farce; he could be arrested summarily and sentenced by a single justice of the peace, from whose judgment there was no appeal. This scandalous regime of oppression was only ended, after a long struggle, by the passing of a reformed Master and Servant Act in 1867.

The Unions were badly hit, too, by the decision of the High Court, in the case of *Hornby v. Close*<sup>1</sup> in 1867, that a Trade Union, as an illegal combination, could not protect its funds by registering as a Friendly Society. The Boilermakers, Engineers and other unions had adopted that course, satisfied that they were thus secure against the defalcations of dishonest officials, and this judgment was a rude shattering of their confidence. Finally, public opinion, ignorant, nervous and prejudiced as usual, was irritated into activity by the general inconvenience and loss caused by the constantly recurring industrial disputes. This irritation was soon turned into open anger by the 'Sheffield outrages'—a form of sabotage or 'rattening,' which ranged from re-

<sup>1</sup> Law Reports, 2 Q.B. 153. This decision was negated in 1869 by the Trade Union Funds Protection Act (32 & 33 Vict. c. 61), which placed Trade Unions within the provisions of sections 24 and 44 of the Friendly Societies Act, 1855.

moving the tools of non-Unionists (or of Unionists who were obnoxious to their fellow-members) to graver acts of terrorism with gunpowder. Of course, the Trade Union movement as a whole had nothing to do with these proceedings—and, indeed, strongly reprobated them; but the general public, as might be expected, were only too ready to believe every Trade Unionist a scoundrelly dynamiter.

When, therefore, a Royal Commission was appointed in 1867 to inquire into the organisation and rules of trade societies, the prospects were ominous. Obviously, it was necessary to secure a legal status, and the Trade Union leaders set to work to convert the country, with the invaluable aid of Frederic Harrison, Professor Beesly, Tom Hughes, M.P., and other middle-class friends who were as active on the workmen's behalf as Joseph Hume had been half a century earlier. In 1868 the first Trades Union Congress was held at Manchester, with the object of rallying the organised working class to the defence of Trade Unionism. Thirty-four delegates attended, representing 118,367 members. Meantime, an unexpectedly favourable impression had been made on the Royal Commission, and the Majority Report, though not very friendly, contained no hostile recommendations. The Minority Report, signed by Hughes, Beesly and Lord Lichfield, was a very skilfully drawn statement of the men's case. It soon

became the basis of a Bill, and after two years of pressure on Parliament, all its main points were incorporated in the Government's measure, the Trade Union Act, 1871. But it was only a partial victory that had so far been won; for with this 'Trade Union Charter' was coupled a Criminal Law Amendment Act, which visited with severe penalties 'picketing,' 'intimidation,' 'molestation,' 'watching and besetting'—which, in fact, under the specious guise of protecting public rights, prohibited all the incidents of effective combination.

The disappointment of the Trade Union world immediately settled down into a steady agitation, in which the lead was taken by the newly appointed Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress,<sup>1</sup> for the repeal of the obnoxious Act. The stupid brutality with which it was enforced, the numberless convictions and imprisonments of workmen up and down the country, added fuel to the fire. But the Liberal Party could not be shaken in its obstinacy—not even by a whole series of independent Labour candidatures. It was left for the Conservative

<sup>1</sup> The third Trades Union Congress, held in London in March 1871, was attended by all the Trade Union leaders, brought together in opposition to the Government's anti-picketing proposals. This meeting elected a Parliamentary Committee, and the 'Conference of Amalgamated Trades,' which, in the persons of Applegarth, Allan, Odger and others, had managed affairs since 1867, was dissolved.



Government, after Mr. Gladstone's defeat at the General Election of 1874, to complete the emancipation of the Trade Unions. The Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act, 1875, replaced the Criminal Law Amendment Act; peaceful picketing was legalised, and no act committed by a combination of persons in a trade dispute was to be treated as a criminal offence unless the same act committed by one person was punishable as a crime. "Collective bargaining," in short, to quote Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Webb, "with all its necessary accompaniments, was, after fifty years of legislative struggle, finally recognised by the law of the land."

Meanwhile, these political struggles and triumphs had been accompanied by an extraordinary burst of activity in the industrial sphere. In 1871, after a five months' strike, the engineers on the North-East coast won a nine hours' day, and within a very short time similar victories were secured by Labour in the engineering shops and shipyards elsewhere, as well as in the building trade. This period, too, witnessed the rise, under the leadership of Joseph Arch, of the Agricultural Labourers' Union, which attained within a few months to a membership of 100,000.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The agricultural labourers were fiercely resisted and often savagely persecuted by the farmers and their abettors, the gentry and the clergy. The membership declined after a few years, and though Arch's Union continued to maintain its existence, the grant of the franchise in 1884, coupled with rising wages—and, it must be

Almost every industry, indeed, shared in the success of these years, and it is estimated that between 1871 and 1875 the number of Trade Unionists was more than doubled.

But unhappily this prosperity was but short-lived. By the middle of the decade there had set in a trade depression, which culminated in 1879 in one of the most disastrous commercial crises of modern times. Hundreds of industrial firms and business houses were reduced to bankruptcy, the army of the unemployed was swollen to an enormous figure, wages were cut down, and working hours increased. Desperate strikes broke out, only to end in disaster to the workmen. In some districts, such as South Wales, Trade Unionism was actually wiped out. Everywhere the members of the Unions melted away, and the funds, even in the biggest societies, were barely able to stand the strain.<sup>1</sup>

This crisis in the fortunes of Trade Unionism is comparable in many respects to that of forty years earlier. The same depression of trade overwhelmed the same high hopes and swept away the same hard-

added, a good deal of internal friction—hopelessly weakened it. There was a temporary revival in the great wave of 1889–90, but by 1894, as Arch himself said, it died a natural death.

<sup>1</sup> The Boilermakers in 1879 had over twenty per cent. of their members drawing unemployed benefit. The A.S.E. paid out in 1878–80, under this head alone, £287,596. The Ironfounders were only saved from ruin by borrowing large sums from individual members.

won gains. In each case the attempt to organise the lower grades of labour—in the shape of the agricultural labourers' and women's unions—was foiled. And at both periods we see a similar frenzied outburst of strikes in the vain attempt to avert the oncoming disaster.

Nevertheless, the end of the crisis in 1879 left the Trade Union forces in very different condition from that in which they found themselves in the early 'forties. Then, the movement was for the moment almost extinguished; now, though it was seriously strained and shaken, its vital forces were unimpaired. Trade Unionism had established itself firmly in the body politic as well as in the hearts of the working class, and its machinery, so patiently built up through the middle years of the century, was strong enough to bear the shock to which it was subjected.

The years following the recovery after the débâcle of 1879 form the transition period from the 'old' to the 'new' Unionism. The Unions had lost heavily, as we have seen, in membership as well as in funds. But they had also lost much of their old vigour. Even before the depression doubts and criticism had crept in. A spirit of aristocratic exclusiveness was beginning to show itself in the great Amalgamated Societies. The officers of the A.S.E. and other important Unions were choked with a mass of routine work

and administrative detail, while the friendly benefit side of their activities was absorbing them more and more. As far back as 1866 a comparatively moderate critic writes that "the once powerful A.S.E. is now as incapable to engage in a strike as the Hearts of Oak or the Foresters." The narcotic of the current political economy was indeed having a deadly effect. Politically, the Trade Union movement was steeped in *laissez faire* individualism, and the leaders combined a policy of cautious opportunism in trade matters with an ardent adherence to Mr. Gladstone and the somewhat limited ideals of mid-Victorian Liberalism. But a change was coming. Modern Socialism appeared on the scene, uncompromising and optimistic. William Morris, H. M. Hyndman and their fellow-pioneers displayed a prodigious activity. The Social Democratic Federation and the Fabian Society were born in 1883, to preach the new gospel. Henry George's *Progress and Poverty*, published in 1879, had already created a great stir, and the social investigations of Mr. Charles Booth and others now revealed the appalling depths of degradation in which vast masses of the people were living. The condition of the unskilled labourers and sweated women in particular appealed to the forward spirits in the Labour movement, and threw into still bolder relief the backwardness of the Trade Unions, many of

which, as Mr. John Burns said in 1887, had now become "mere middle and upper class rate-reducing institutions." At last the pot boiled over. The match-girls came out on strike in 1888, and won the sympathy of the public and better conditions. In 1889 the Gasworkers' and General Labourers' Union was formed and speedily enrolled thousands of men, and within a few months the London gas stokers had won an Eight-Hour Day in a bloodless contest. Almost immediately after this came the historic Dock Strike, under the leadership of John Burns, Ben Tillett and Tom Mann. It began with a demand of the labourers at the South-West India Dock for an increase of their wage from 5d. to 6d. an hour, the abolition of sub-contract work, extra pay for overtime and a minimum engagement of four hours. The whole Thames-side promptly joined in the fray, substantial contributions, including £12,000 from the general public at home and £30,000 from Australia, poured into the strike funds, and, after the Port of London had been paralysed for nearly five weeks, the 'dockers' tanner,' together with practically all the rest of their claims, was conceded by the employers. The dockers' success gave an enormous impetus to the organisation of the unskilled labourers. The Dockers', the Gasworkers', the Sailors' and Firemen's, the General Railway Workers' and other Unions, showed an astonishing

expansion, and in less than a year something like 200,000 of the "unskilled" were brought into the Trade Union ranks. These new societies, resembling in many respects the organisations of Owen's time, were militant bodies, with low contributions and little in the way of friendly benefits. "We have only one benefit attached," said the General Secretary of the Gasworkers in 1889, "and that is strike pay. I do not believe in having sick pay, out-of-work pay, and a number of other pays. . . ." The wave spread even to the older and more 'aristocratic' societies, and the Engineers, Miners, Boot and Shoe Operatives, Bricklayers and many others increased their membership, in the course of these two or three years, by tens of thousands. There was a movement, too, for greater unity; and a number of federations were formed, while Trades Councils sprang up all over the country. The 'new Unionism' was triumphant.

The early 'nineties, then, witnessed a growth of membership in the Unions paralleled by that of twenty years before. But there was a new feature in the Socialism that was inspiring the younger men in the movement—a Socialism which meant a larger and very different political ideal from that held by the cautious leaders of the old school. This new conception of politics now becomes the main factor in the Trade Union development—its development

on one side, that is to say, for we shall find it convenient, in bringing our account down to the present day, to deal separately with the political and the industrial activities of the Unions. Put shortly, the political history of Labour since 1890 is summed up in the birth and growth of the Labour Party.

An enthusiastic and tireless propaganda was being conducted by the Socialists at the street corner, in the press and in the workshop. Independent candidates were run at the General Election of 1892, and three of them, Messrs. Keir Hardie, John Burns and Havelock Wilson, were returned. In 1893 the Independent Labour Party, which is now the largest Socialist body in the country, was founded, and at the next election in 1895 put forward no less than twenty-eight candidates, of whom none were successful. Meanwhile the campaign for Independent Labour representation was prosecuted vigorously in the Trades Union Congress year by year, with the majorities against it steadily diminishing. At last, in 1899, the Congress was converted, and the Labour Representation Committee was born in the following year. Fifteen candidates ran under its auspices at the General Election, but only Messrs. Keir Hardie and Richard Bell, of the Railway Servants, were successful. An enormous amount of steady spade-work in the country, however, coupled with the feeling aroused throughout the Trade

Union world by the Taff Vale Judgment, resulted in 1906 in the return of a compact Labour Party of twenty-nine. It increased its members to forty in 1910 by the accession of the miners' representatives, which, as it seemed, signalised the fall of the last stronghold of Liberal-Labourism. But the "whirligig of time brings in his revenges," and the very stalwarts who fought for independence now found themselves accused, by malcontents in their own ranks, of sacrificing the substance of what they had won by their subservience to the Liberal Party; while on the other flank they were assailed by the 'new Unionists' of the day, demanding that the futile weapon of Parliamentaryism should be abandoned for 'direct action.'

It is not necessary here to refer to the work of the Labour Party in Parliament, except in so far as its action has directly affected the Trade Unions on three important occasions. In its first year it won a great triumph by the passage of the Trade Disputes Act, 1906, which at last rescued the Trade Unions from the position in which the Taff Vale Judgment had left them. The Government's Bill, as originally introduced, had provided entirely inadequate safeguards for the Trade Unions, and it was due to the determined insistence of the Labour Party, then regarded with very respectful awe by the Government, that this Bill was abandoned and its own proposals substituted. In neither of its other interventions



was it so successful. Its support of the Insurance scheme (now the National Insurance Act, 1911), though it had the endorsement of a specially summoned conference of its constituent bodies, was resented by a large minority, at least, of its friends, including four or five of its own Members of Parliament who were opposed to the contributory principle and actually cast their votes against the Bill on its third reading. The last important achievement, in which the Labour Party took part, is the Trade Union Act, 1913, under which the disabilities imposed by the famous Osborne Judgment were removed. In this matter the Party had to accept a much smaller concession to its demands than in 1906, and though a special conference again authorised the acceptance of the Government's proposals, there was a general feeling that Trade Unionism had won but half a victory.

Turning now to internal organisation and the purely industrial side, we find from 1890 onwards a steady growth in membership of the Unions—with slight declines in the depressions of 1892, 1902-4, and 1907-9—until it reached at the end of 1913 a total of just under four millions.<sup>1</sup> A large number

<sup>1</sup> Some, though it is impossible to say how much, of the increase during the last two years is due to the National Insurance Act, 1911, under which Trade Unions may be Approved Societies for the administration of sickness benefit.

of new societies is springing into existence—some of them in industries where previously combination was feeble or even unknown. Thus the Shop Assistants, Ship Stewards, Hotel Employees and Waiters, British Gardeners and Carotakers are all quite modern creations, as also are the associations of the ‘black-coated proletariat,’ such as the clerks, assurance agents, journalists, and musicians, of public servants like the postmen and municipal employees, and of women workers of all grades, from midwives and milliners to domestic servants and jam and pickle girls. The process of consolidating has always been slow, and there were in 1914 over 1100 separate Unions in the Kingdom, many of them overlapping and competing one with another within the same industry.<sup>1</sup> The year 1899, however, which saw the birth of the Labour Representation Committee, was notable also for the foundation of the General Federation of Trade Unions, which was intended to be, in the words of its Secretary, “a strong central organisation, gathering to itself all the scattered forces of the movement . . . and backed by a gigantic central fund, the whole of which should be at the service of any society fighting to

<sup>1</sup> It must not be supposed, of course, that all these are entirely isolated bodies; a great deal of federal organisation exists (see below, Chaps. III. and X.). Nevertheless, when all this has been taken into account, there still remains a disastrous amount of independence and confusion.

maintain its existence, or to improve the lot of its members."<sup>1</sup>

The policy of conciliation in trade disputes has also made a very considerable advance during recent years, though of late the workmen have come to regard it, not unreasonably, as we shall show presently, with a good deal of suspicion. In 1896 the Conciliation Act was passed, giving the Board of Trade power to mediate when called in by the combatants, while agreements have been made between employers and workmen in almost every trade for the use, in one form or another, of the machinery of conciliation. It must not be imagined, however, that these arrangements have done away with strikes or lock-outs. The last few years, indeed, have witnessed a greater number of disputes than ever before. No less than 1462 trade disputes are recorded by the Board of Trade as having taken place in 1913, or more than double the average of the preceding twenty years. Many of the disputes—even before the end of the last century—are remarkable for the emergence of some of the peculiarly modern problems which Trade Unionism has to face. Thus in the Coal Strike of 1893 we find the miners for the first time demanding not merely higher rates but a 'living wage,' irrespective of fluctuations in prices

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<sup>1</sup> See below, pp. 68 ff., for more detailed reference to the General Federation.

or coalmasters' profits—a principle at last conceded in the Coal Mines (Minimum Wage) Act after the great strike of 1912. The contest in the boot and shoe trade in 1895 raged round the merits of piece-rates as opposed to time-rates. The claim to 'recognition'—the right of the organised workmen, that is, to appoint a Trade Union official, or whom they choose, to negotiate in their collective behalf with their employers—has figured prominently in many of the more recent conflicts—notably the railway strikes of 1907 and 1911, and those of the transport workers in 1911 and 1912, while the desperate struggle in Dublin in 1913 was caused by the refusal of the employers not merely to 'recognise' the officials of the Irish 'Transport Workers' Union, but even to employ men who were members of that Union. Another cause of dispute which during this period is assuming larger and larger proportions is the objection of Trade Unionists to working with non-Unionists (this was at the bottom of the protracted lock-out in the London building trade in the spring and summer of 1914); while the increasing assertion of 'moral' rights is evidenced by the number of strikes against tyrannous conduct on the part of employers or foremen, unjust dismissals of fellow-employees, and the like.

But the outstanding features of this last period

are the two heavy blows aimed at the Trade Unions by the Law Courts, and the recurrence, with a sort of cyclical regularity, of 'new Unionism,' this time in the form of what is sometimes referred to, rather inaccurately, as Syndicalism.

In the summer of 1900 a strike broke out in South Wales on the Taff Vale Railway, in the course of which the Company, naturally enough, suffered a certain amount of injury. They applied to the High Court for an injunction not only against alleged individual wrongdoers, but against the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants itself, whose agents these wrongdoers were. They also commenced a civil suit for damages against the Union in its corporate capacity. To the surprise of all who were familiar with Trade Union law and practice, and to the consternation of the Labour world, the A.S.R.S. was mulcted, in costs and damages, to the tune of £42,000, and it was decided that a Trade Union could be sued in its collective capacity, and its corporate funds made liable for a tortious act committed by any of its officials or members who could be deemed to be its agents.

Hitherto no one had dreamed but that the Act of 1871 afforded absolute protection to the Union funds, since Parliament at that time had deliberately refrained from giving a Trade Union the privileges and burdens of incorporation. It was a staggering

blow, therefore, when the House of Lords held that a Union, though not strictly a corporation, possessed all the essential qualities of a corporation that its enemies required. No society in a dispute could now feel itself safe, however carefully its officials and members might act; the engine of the law might be all too easily made an engine of oppression; and the funds of any Union, which should dare to make a move, were liable to be swept into the pockets of lawyers and employers. The judgment roused the whole Trade Union world to demand relief from such an impossible situation. The membership of the Labour Representation Committee, which stood at 356,000 in 1902, leaped up to 861,000 in the following year, and to nearly a million in 1904, and a vigorous agitation was carried on up and down the country. Despite all efforts, however, it was not until 1906 that the Trade Disputes Act was passed, providing that "an action against a Trade Union . . . or against any members or officials thereof on behalf of themselves and all other members of the Union in respect of any tortious act alleged to have been committed by or on behalf of the Trade Union shall not be entertained by any Court."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Trade Disputes Act (6 Edw. VII. c. 47), also legalised peaceful picketing (sect. 2); made acts done in 'restraint of trade' (*e.g.* inducing a breach of contract of employment) not actionable, so long as no violence or threats are used (sect. 3); and, by providing that an act done by a combination of persons in

Hardly, however, had the Trade Unions settled down after this victory, before they were attacked on the other flank. Mr. W. V. Osborne, the Secretary of one of the branches of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, strenuously opposed the right of his Union to levy its members or contribute from its funds in support of the Labour Party. An action in the Chancery Court in 1908 went in favour of the Society; but the judges of the Court of Appeal reversed this decision, and their judgment was finally upheld by the House of Lords. The effect of this was another revolution in the legal status of Trade Unionism. Trade Unions were again found to be, as they had been found in the *Taff Vale* case, if not corporations, at least 'quasi-corporations,' and they could therefore do nothing outside the purposes for which the statute had incorporated them. These purposes were discovered

furtherance of a trade dispute should not be actionable unless it would have been an actionable wrong if committed by one person, put the civil liability in respect of 'conspiracy' on the same footing as the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act, 1875, had put the criminal liability (sect. 1). It is worth noting that the Courts have recently decided that a Trade Union need not be actually engaged in a dispute in order to gain the protection of the Trade Disputes Act. In the case of *Warner v. London Society of Compositors* (1913, A.C. 107), a firm sued the Society for conspiracy to libel and for libel (by imputing, positively in a letter, and negatively by omission from the 'Fair List,' that the plaintiffs' was not a fair house). The House of Lords held that no action lay.

in the Trade Union Act Amendment Act of 1876, and among them there was no reference to the payment of Members of Parliament or to any other political activity. Consequently it must be held *ultra vires* for a Trade Union to indulge in political action, even though the whole of its members might be unanimous in desiring that it should do so. It is not necessary to criticise this judgment here; suffice it to say that it was clearly contrary to the intention of Parliament in 1876 to limit the functions of the Union in this way, and the majority of the judges, in declaring that action of a political character by the Trade Unions was not contemplated by the House of Commons at that time, showed an astonishing ignorance of history. For the Labour movement the matter was very critical, since it required no great stretch of imagination to see that, on the basis of this judgment, many of their most important powers might be filched from the Unions, including the expenditure on education, on the publication of literature or newspapers, even on certain of their benefits. And the bitterness was still further enhanced by the feeling that class-bias was at the bottom of the judgment, and that the Courts were laying down one law for the workman and another for the capitalist.

As an immediate result injunctions were served upon one Union after another, political action, both



local<sup>1</sup> and national, was crippled, and but for the State payment of Members' salaries, coupled with the voluntary support which many of the societies continued to give, the Parliamentary Labour Party itself would have been in an untenable position. The Trade Unions, of course, demanded a reversal of the judgment, but the Labour world showed itself somewhat apathetic about the whole question, and redress was delayed for more than three years, when a compromise, the best that the Labour Party found itself able to secure, was passed in the shape of the Trade Union Act, 1913. Under this statute, a Trade Union is authorised to include in its objects, on certain defined conditions, the expenditure of money on candidatures for Parliament or any public office, and on the distribution of literature, the holding of meetings, electoral registration work, and the maintenance of elected representatives.

The conditions are—(1) that a ballot of the Union must first have been taken, and a majority of those voting have declared in favour of such political action; (2) that the political fund must be kept separate, and no member obliged to contribute to it if he gives notice that he objects; and (3) that contribution to this political fund must not

<sup>1</sup> In the case of *Wilson v. Amalgamated Society of Engineers* (1911, 2 Ch. 324), it was expressly held that the Osborne Judgment covered local as well as parliamentary representation. •

be made a condition of admission to the Union, nor must any member, who refuses to contribute, be penalised on that account by being excluded from any benefits or put under any disability or disadvantage as compared with his fellows.

With this measure the Unions had to content themselves. Theoretically, no doubt, there is much to be said for the protection of the rights of a minority which conscientiously objects to supporting a political party, though, on the other hand, it is urged that this minority shares equally in the benefits secured by the majority through political action—just as the non-Unionist benefits by the improved conditions won through industrial organisation—without paying his share of the cost. What the full effects of the Act may be, it is too early to say as yet. The machinery is cumbersome and many of the Unions were slow in taking their ballots.<sup>1</sup>

The other feature—the ‘new Unionism’ of the time—was the child of the ‘labour unrest,’ which began to assume formidable proportions in the latter part of 1910. That unrest had a variety of causes, economic, moral, social. From the beginning of the century the cost of living was mounting steadily.

<sup>1</sup> Twenty-five Unions had balloted up to 14th January 1914, and in every case there was a majority in favour of political action—(the total votes cast were 473,880 for, and 323,613 against). See Report of Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies for 1912, (89) 1914.  
 \* One of two societies have since declared against political action.

Prices in general, according to the most moderate and official estimates, were nine or ten per cent. higher in 1910 than in 1901. In the same period wages were falling in many trades, and by the end of the decade, as we learn from the carefully compiled Reports of the Board of Trade,<sup>1</sup> the real wages of the manual workers as a whole were lower than they were at the beginning of the century. On the other hand, though statistics might not bear out the common assertion that the rich were growing richer, the national income was increasing, the gross inequalities in its distribution were becoming more and more patent, and the struggling poor were well able to see with their own eyes the way in which a great part, at least, of this enormous wealth was spent—indeed, they were often forced by the rich themselves to be spectators of such an orgy of vulgar extravagance and barely concealed corruption as has but seldom been exceeded in history. And after forty years of general education, they no longer looked on with the wonder and envy of children, but with the eyes of understanding and the determination of men. The discontent was sharpened, too, by the growing concentration and aggressiveness of capital. In many industries the

<sup>1</sup> See Board of Trade Report on Changes in Rates of Wages and Hours of Labour (Cd. 7080), 1913. Cf. *Riches and Poverty*, by L. Chiozza Money, and *The Change in the Distribution of the National Income, 1880-1913*, by A. L. Bowley (1920).

workmen were goaded into revolt by the action, sometimes deliberate (as *e.g.* in the Boilermakers' dispute in 1910), of their employers. •

Here then was cause enough, and more than enough, for a large upheaval. The Trade Union forces were bound to fight. But what were to be their tactics and their objective? There was a new spirit in the ranks, and new ideas in the minds of some at least of the leaders. These ideas did not amount to Syndicalism, but they were 'syndicalistic,' ranging from the anglicised 'Industrial Unionism' preached so assiduously by Mr. Tom Mann to a more or less vague dissatisfaction with the Parliamentary Labour Party. It was, no doubt, this disappointment with the Labour Party's achievements—a disappointment for which it is not fair to lay all the blame on the Labour Party—that was the principal factor in the situation, that opened the ears of the Trade Unionists to the gospel of 'direct action,' and thus stamped many of the disputes of these three years with their peculiar character. Just as the Trade Unionists in Robert Owen's day eighty years ago, worsted in their efforts to overthrow capitalism by 'direct action,' turned disillusioned to the political weapons of Chartism, so now there appeared a revulsion from the exaggerated hopes placed in parliamentary representation to the old methods of industrial warfare. But the comparison must not

be pressed too far; for to assume a complete analogy would be to exaggerate unduly both the defects of the Labour Party and the influence of Syndicalism.

NOTE, 1921.--For the later history of Trade Unionism, from 1915 onwards, see below, Chap. IX.

## CHAPTER III

### TRADE UNION ORGANISATION

Primitive Democracy—Growth of Bureaucracy and of Representative Institutions—Finances of the Unions—Structural Developments—The Trades Union Congress and the General Federation of Trade Unions—Survey of the Trade Union Movement in 1914.

THE Trade Union movement at all times and in all lands takes the form of what has aptly been called ‘an industrial democracy.’ But the forms of democracy are not one but many, and the elaborate organisations of the engineers, or the textile operatives or the miners not only represent a remarkable advance on their forerunners, the local Trade Clubs or Lodges, of a century ago; they show very considerable points of difference among themselves, whilst the variations between the British and the French types on the one hand, or the German on the other, are still more striking.

In their early days the practices and proceedings of the Unions revealed a somewhat crude conception of democracy. Every detail was decided by the

whole of the members assembled in mass meeting—as, indeed, was not only easy but natural, when a single club-room sufficed to contain the whole society. The officers—President, Stewards (who kept the door and fetched the drinks) and Committee-men—were generally chosen to serve in rotation. To take one's turn of office was compulsory, the penalty for refusal being a fine varying from a shilling to half a guinea.<sup>1</sup> As the societies expanded, and branches or lodges had to be formed in different localities, the same idea of sharing the burden of office by rotation was extended to these lodges. The headquarters of the Union was regularly moved from place to place, each lodge taking it in turn to act as the 'Governing Branch,' and its officers and committee thereby becoming the central executive for the time being.

Another of the peculiar devices of democracy which found favour in the Trade Union world was the referendum. Indeed, the referendum and its twin, the initiative, were during the middle of last century almost worked to death. Practically any question could be submitted, not merely by the central executive, but by any branch, to the vote of

<sup>1</sup> This practice has survived down to our own day—*e.g.* the Stone Masons, Bricklayers, Steam Engine Makers, etc., have continued to impose a fine of 1s. on a member refusing to stand his nomination for office in his lodge, and 2s. 6d. if he is elected and declines to serve, unless a satisfactory reason is given.

the whole membership, and Mr. and Mrs. Webb give some startling illustrations of the extent to which this privilege was used. The Stone Masons, for example, took plebiscites of the Society on the amount of beer to be allowed to the executive, and on the very thrifty proposal to put the office of General Secretary up to the lowest tender; whilst many of the Unions had to protest against the constant use of the referendum to abrogate the rules by paying benefits to members ineligible for them.

As time wore on, however, these older devices disappeared. The referendum was presently discredited, and its use strictly limited to certain important matters—such as the decisions in regard to a strike or the affiliation of the Union to a political party. The ‘Governing Branch’ had passed away even earlier,<sup>1</sup> and the logic of facts had firmly established the modern plan of fixed headquarters with paid officials in charge of the society’s affairs.

These paid General Secretaries at the head of the Unions are, it is hardly necessary to say, extremely important personages in the ‘Trade Union world to-day.’ They are responsible for all the secretarial as well as a large part of the financial business of the

<sup>1</sup> The ‘Governing Branch,’ however, lingered long in one or two Unions, and a relic of it might be found but a few years back in the rule of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners, under which the central executive members must be drawn from the district round Manchester, where the General Office was situated.



society. They often edit the monthly or fortnightly journal; they play, as a rule, the chief part in negotiations with employers, in peace or war; they have to exercise their authority in many internal disputes. They represent their society before the public—on the platform, in the press, in the law courts. Sometimes (on the well-known principle of modern democracy that the busiest men should be made busier still) they are Members of Parliament into the bargain. In the larger Unions, of course, the Secretary is generally helped by assistant-secretaries, by paid ‘organisers’ and other officials. In some cases there have been very elaborate developments. Thus the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, copied later by the Boilermakers, has evolved a regular bureaucracy.<sup>1</sup> It has in daily attendance at its headquarters in London, a paid Executive Council of a Chairman and seven members, elected by ballot from the seven divisions into which Great Britain is divided. Side by side with this Council, and largely under its control, works the General Secretary with four assistants. For organising purposes there is a staff (under the direction of the Executive Council) of twelve Organising District Delegates, each elected for three years (and re-

<sup>1</sup>The A.S.E. ceased to exist as a separate body in 1920, becoming a part of a still larger combination, the Amalgamated Engineering Union. For this, see Chap. X. below.

eligible) from and by the district in which he has worked and resided for the twelve months immediately preceding his nomination. The duties of these Organising District Delegates include the visiting and strengthening of branches, the attending of conferences, the interviewing of employers, and so on. There is also a network of District Committees, varying in size according to the number of branches in the district. The Committee-men, who must be working at their trade, are elected half-yearly (the President and Secretary annually), and are empowered, subject to the approval of the Executive Council, to deal with questions of trade disputes, wages, hours and conditions of labour, and so on, in their respective areas. In London, Manchester, Newcastle and Glasgow the District Secretaries are whole-time officers elected for three years and assisting the Organising District Delegates. The remuneration of these various officials ranges from 1s. per meeting to the District Committee-men, up to £4, 10s. per week (with rent, coal and gas free) to the General Secretary.

At the head of the whole organisation are the Delegate Meeting and Final Appeal Court. The Delegate Meeting consists of one delegate for every 3000 members chosen from equal electoral areas. It is only summoned in emergencies or to deal with matters vitally affecting the society. It has power

to alter or rescind any rule (due notice having been given to the branches), but it must not abrogate any of the principles of the Society, "unless thereafter 40 per cent. of the membership vote in favour of the change." The Final Appeal Court, composed of one delegate for every 6000 members and meeting every two years, considers and decides all appeals against the rulings of the Executive Council.<sup>1</sup>

In the wealthy and powerful printing trade organisation of the Metropolis, the London Society of Compositors, the management is vested in a Committee elected annually by ballot.<sup>2</sup> The Executive officers, however, consisting of Parliamentary Secretary, Treasurer, Chairman, Secretary, Assistant and Organising Secretary, Assistants, Trustees and Auditors, are elected separately by the Annual General Meeting. The Secretary is "under the sole direction of the Committee," and the Committee itself is

<sup>1</sup> The Final Appeal Court of the Boilermakers is called the General Council, and is composed of seven members chosen by equal electoral districts. It has power to annul or set aside any act or decision of the Executive Council contravening the rules.

<sup>2</sup> The Society is divided into two sections—the Book Department (comprising all journeymen in offices where bookwork, jobbing, and weekly newspapers are done) and the News Department (comprising all journeymen employed on daily newspapers). The account in the text refers primarily to the Book Department. The News Department has its own organisation and its own secretary; but its basis is almost identical, and on matters affecting the Society as a whole it is subject to the same rules as the Book Department.

ultimately responsible to the quarterly Delegate Meeting,<sup>1</sup> representing the whole society, and in various important matters cannot act without authorisation given by a ballot of all the members. Such matters include any extension of the usual benefits or any proposal involving a regular charge on the income; all grants of money exceeding £30; any movement "for alteration of scale or advance of wages, and generally any question affecting the constitution or management of the Society."

The National Union of Gasworkers and General Labourers has constituted its governing organs in a different way. The "supreme authority" is vested in the biennial Congress, composed of delegates from all districts into which the Union is divided—one delegate being elected for "every complete 1000 financial members in any district." The "government of the Union" is vested in an Executive Council composed of the General Secretary and two representatives from each of the districts into which the country is divided. One of these two representatives must be the District Secretary (who has been elected to that office by a ballot of

<sup>1</sup> The Delegates are elected (1) from the different printing offices (in the proportion of one delegate for every twelve members, or part of twelve, in the office), and (2) from the unemployed members on the books, in the same proportion of one in twelve. Delegate Meetings are held quarterly, and on special occasions if requisitioned according to rule.

the district for two years), the second is elected (also by ballot of the district)—*ad hoc*, so to speak—for one year. The General Secretary, on the other hand, like the other officers of the Union—Assistant General Secretary, Trustees, Auditors and Organisers—is elected by the ballot of the whole Union, and he is not, as in some other societies, the servant of the Executive Council, but sits as a colleague with the right to speak and vote. And he is, besides, the chief financial officer of the Union. But the most remarkable feature of the constitution is the provision for proportional representation on the Executive, in the rule that “when a vote is challenged on the Executive Council, the vote shall be taken on the basis of the financial membership of the districts,” while the referendum appears again in the right allowed to “any District Council not being satisfied with an action or decision of the Executive Council to demand a vote of the whole Union on the question in dispute.”

In the National Union of Railwaymen the “supreme government” is entrusted to an annual meeting of representatives, sixty in number, and elected by localities on the single transferable vote system, while the General and Assistant Secretaries and Organisers, as with the Gasworkers, are chosen by ballot of the whole society. The four Assistant Secretaries, it is interesting to observe, are not

merely required to assist in the correspondence and general work of the office, but, by a provision of considerable importance from the point of view of administrative efficiency, are made definitely responsible for four different departments—Finance, Legal, Movements and Organisation. The most striking feature of the whole scheme, however, is the recognition of sectional or professional interests in the appointment of the Executive Committee. This Executive of twenty-four members is chosen by ballot (again on the single transferable vote system) from six electoral districts. “Within those districts the various grades shall be divided into four electoral departments. The electoral departments shall be classified as follows: (1) locomotive department; (2) traffic department; (3) goods and cartage department; (4) engineering shops and permanent way.” The value of this arrangement will be clearer presently, when we come to consider the problems of Trade Union structure and control.<sup>1</sup>

Another remarkable development is the creation in the textile and mining industries of completely ‘representative institutions.’ Thus the Amalgamated Association of Operative Cotton Spinners, numbering some 24,000 members in Lancashire, has a parliament of representatives (not merely delegates), elected annually from the various

<sup>1</sup> See below, Chap. VIII.

provinces and districts included in the Association, and meeting quarterly with sovereign powers. It appoints its own Executive Council and officers, including the General Secretary himself, who are directly and continuously responsible to it instead of, as ordinarily in the Trade Union world, to the whole body of members of the society. The textile industry has, of course, its 'civil service,' in the shape of officials not only trained in the normal business of administration, but expert in the complicated details of technical processes, piecework rates, and the like. But "the Cotton Spinners' Parliament," as Mr. and Mrs. Webb put it, "is no formal gathering of casual members to register the desires of a dominant bureaucracy. It is, on the contrary, a highly-organised deliberative assembly, with active representatives from the different localities, each alive to the distinct, and sometimes divergent, interests of his own constituents."<sup>1</sup> Other textile Unions, such as the Amalgamated Weavers, and the Amalgamated Association of Beamers, Twisters, Drawers and Machine Workers, are governed on much the same principles, though their rules differ somewhat from those of the Spinners.

A typical example from the coal-mining industry may be seen in the constitution of the Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Federation. Here the

<sup>1</sup> *Industrial Democracy*, p. 41.

supreme body is "a general meeting of the Federation, called a Conference," meeting every four weeks, or oftener if necessary. It is composed of delegates from all the branches, besides the Federation officers, who are themselves elected each year by the January Conference. The Miners' Federation of Great Britain, to which the Lancashire and Cheshire Miners, like those of all the other coalfields, are affiliated, is itself ruled by a yearly conference, and officers and an executive elected by that conference.

So far we have described the central management as it appears in certain typical Unions. But just as the organisation of an army is not to be sought only in its headquarters' staff, or that of a political state in its national government alone, so the working of a great Trade Union depends largely on its local branches. The amount of power possessed by the branch as against the whole Union varies in different cases, and gives rise to a very considerable problem which we shall discuss later. The particular feature which we have to note at the moment is the host of non-commissioned officers, as they may be called, comprised by the secretaries and the officials of the branches.<sup>1</sup> Many of these branch secretaries

<sup>1</sup> Thus every branch of the Amalgamated Engineering Union with not more than forty members is required to elect a President, Secretary, Treasurer and Check-book Keeper. If it has more than



and committee-men are persons of great influence, and it is obvious that the efficiency of the Trade Union movement depends to an enormous extent on their integrity and ability. These local officers are men working at their trade, and receiving, as a rule, only a very small sum for the discharge of their duties to the Union.

The financial business of the Trade Unions is very large, and it has been enormously increased and complicated for those which have become approved societies under the National Insurance Act. The income of the Union is, of course, mainly derived from the members' contributions, which range from 3d. or 4d. a week in the labourers' societies to 1s. 6d. in the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, the Boiler-makers, or the London Society of Compositors, while entrance fees vary from 1s. (sometimes, as for women and youths in the Gasworkers and General Labourers, only 6d.) to £1 or more. Contributions (*i.e.* ordinary subscriptions, levies, entrance fees and fines) usually account for over 90 per cent. of the total income.

The expenditure falls under three principal heads—benefits, affiliation fees to federations, congresses, etc., and administrative expenses. The benefits differ

forty members it must have a Doorkeeper; if more than 100, a Vice-president; if more than 150, a Money-steward and an Assistant Secretary in addition.

widely in the different Unions:<sup>1</sup> the most complete list includes superannuation, out-of-work donation, dispute pay, sick, accident, and funeral benefit; compensation for loss of tools, etc., by fire; emigration and travelling allowances; sometimes, as in the case of the railwaymen, there is also an orphan fund. The expenditure by the 100 principal Unions, with a membership of 2,000,102 in the year 1912, on these various items was as follows:—unemployment, £597,662; dispute, £1,374,884; sickness and accident, £440,047; superannuation, £425,182; funeral, £119,075; special grants to members and to other Unions, and affiliation fees to trades councils; federations, congresses, etc., £163,187; working expenses, £703,240—grand total, £3,823,277. The aggregate income for the year was £3,230,179, and the funds standing to their credit £5,001,505.

Turning now from government to structure, we find a much slower development. Many of the old trade Clubs and localised societies have, of course, passed into the great modern Unions extending over the whole Kingdom—and sometimes, as with the Carpenters and Joiners or the Engineers, to the United States and the Colonies. But almost every industry still has a mass of independent societies on the narrowest craft basis, and the recognition of the importance of closer unity is only now beginning to

<sup>1</sup> See below, Chap. VI.

make headway.<sup>1</sup> In the clothing trades, for instance, there are separate Unions of hatters, glovers, waist-coat makers, corset makers, fur-skin dressers, boot and shoe operatives, milliners, tailors and tailoresses. In the metal industry, outside the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, there are ironfounders, tinsmiths, coppersmiths, brassfounders, sheet-metal workers, blacksmiths, steam-engine makers, pattern makers, tool makers, file makers, wire workers, chain makers, needle makers, scientific instrument makers. The A.S.E. itself set out to unite all sections of skilled mechanics in one great 'occupational' Union and to do away with the anomalies and absurdities of the host of independent metalworkers' crafts. But it has defeated its own object by neglecting to give adequate representation to the legitimate craft interests it has absorbed, and consequently has failed to draw in many of its smaller competitors. As regards 'Industrial Unionism'—the grouping, that

<sup>1</sup> The most important fusion of recent date is that of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, the General Railway Workers' Union and the United Pointsmen and Signalmen's Society, which have recently combined to form the National Union of Railwaymen. (But the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen is still outside this body, as also is the Railway Clerks' Association.) Another interesting creation is the Amalgamated Society of Gold, Silver, and Kindred Trades, formed in 1912 by the fusion of ten small Unions located in Sheffield and in London. There is a good deal of discussion of amalgamation in the clothing, engineering and shipbuilding, printing, textile, building and other industries.

## TRADE UNION ORGANISATION 61

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is to say, of all the different workers employed in a given industry, or 'form of production,' regardless of the process or material on which they are engaged—there is practically none, although in two important cases it may be said to exist in embryo. The National Union of Railwaymen is open to all employees of railway companies (though actually there are a great many railway-shop workers organised in general labour and metal Unions, as well as the clerks in their separate society); whilst in coal-mining it only needs the inclusion of the mechanics and the surfacemen in the Miners' Associations—by no means an impossible development—to establish a complete 'industrial Union.'

Apart from actual fusion, the linking together of the separate Unions has taken four main forms. First, we find federation among the various crafts comprising the different industries for the promotion of their corporate interests. Secondly, the federations or the unfederated Unions (or the bulk of them) are affiliated, for the purposes which all have in common on the industrial field, to the Trades Union Congress and to a lesser extent to the General Federation of Trade Unions. Thirdly, for political purposes some two-thirds of them adhere to the Labour Party. And, lastly, the local branches or lodges of different Unions are generally united in Trades Councils or Labour Representation Com-

mittees, in the two or three hundred towns where these exist, to promote locally the same industrial or political ends which the Labour Party or the Trades Union Congress promote nationally.

With the purely political bodies—the national and local Labour Parties, we need not deal particularly here. Nor, unfortunately, is there much to say of the Trades Councils. Properly organised, they might everywhere be very effective instruments for advancing the common industrial interests of their localities. But, ignored or neglected as they generally are by the central executives of the Unions, ousted from representation at the Trades Union Congress, and crippled for lack of funds, too many of them can do little more than demonstrate and pass more or less futile resolutions.<sup>1</sup>

We are left, then, with the professional federations and the Trades Union Congress and the General Federation of Trade Unions, which must be briefly discussed.

The most complete and successful professional federations are those of the miners and the textile

<sup>1</sup> This criticism refers, of course, to the 'non-political' Trades Councils. Some of them are really local Labour Parties (often, in fact, the organisation is called "Trades Council and Labour Representative Committee"), and there the case is better, since they have a political programme and a central guidance available. But a Trades Council ought to aim at being more than an efficient electoral machine. A comparison with the Trades Councils of France or of Germany shows our weakness only too clearly.

operatives. The Miners' Federation of Great Britain, founded in 1888, now includes every coal-miners' association in the country, with a total membership of over 700,000. It is, so to speak, the grand parliament of the industry, dealing with wages, hours and working conditions of the miners generally, as well as promoting and financing Labour representation in the House of Commons. The Lancashire cotton trade combinations, to which we have referred above, also present a fairly compact front. But in these industries, it should be remembered, federation is comparatively easy, if not natural, by reason of the definite localisation of the one, and of the small extent of differentiated crafts within the other.

In trades where it is a case of uniting a number of quite separate occupations the difficulty is much greater, and the success achieved much less. The strongest federations, outside those of the miners and textiles, are found in the metal, printing and transport industries.<sup>1</sup> The British Metal Trades Federation, established in 1906, and including now twenty-six Unions with a total membership of about 300,000, aims at the prevention of overlapping, greater uniformity and co-operation, the fostering of international relations, etc. ; but though it looks imposing

<sup>1</sup> See Chap. X. for important developments which have taken place since the war.

in point of numbers, it is not really a very effective force. Still larger is the Engineering and Ship-building Trades Federation, with twenty-eight affiliated societies and nearly half a million members, which is principally concerned with the business of conciliation in trade disputes and with demarcation questions arising between Union and Union. It is true that its objects include the "maintenance of the right of combination," the "promotion of collective bargaining by securing the active co-operation of the affiliated bodies, the unification of agreements, and mutual support in local and sectional disputes"; but its internal arrangements are not very harmonious, and its importance lies rather in what it may become in the future than in what it does at present. The Printing and Kindred Trades Federation, embracing all the chief Unions in the letterpress printing, lithographic printing, bookbinding and papermaking trades, covers between 70,000 and 80,000 individuals. It aims at securing unity of action, uniformity of customs and hours in the different branches of the trade. It supports a Conciliation Board with a view to preventing strikes, but it also has a central fund for the payment of benefits in the case of a strike occurring.

The 'Transport Workers' Federation is a young organisation, only founded in 1911, but it has already introduced a great measure of unity, and is steadily

moving towards an amalgamation of all workers in the industry (excepting, of course, the railwaymen, and the bulk of the tramwaymen, who at present show no disposition to give up their independence). Its affiliated Unions are the Dockers, Sailors and Firemen, Stevedores, Watermen and Lightermen, Ship Stewards and Cooks, Engine and Crane Drivers, Carters, Vehicle Workers, Coalheavers, Gasworkers and the National Amalgamated Labourers, and its total membership amounted in 1913 to about 160,000.

The building industry for long had only a local and weak type of federation. But the recent formation of the National Federation of Building Trades Operatives brings it to a far higher level of efficiency. The textile operatives' largest federation, the United Textile Factory Workers' Association, comprising weavers, spinners, bleachers and dyers, twistors and drawers, and overlookers, is a purely political body, its aim being "the removal of every grievance from which its members may be suffering, for which parliamentary or governmental interference is required." A later organisation, founded in 1905, the Northern Counties Textile Trades' Federation, is an organising and advisory body acting as arbitrator in internal conflicts among its local societies and intervening on behalf of the operatives in trade disputes, under 'joint rules' drawn up between the



Federation and the employers. It will be seen, then, that federal organisation, taken as a whole, is as yet distinctly weak. In many important industries it is non-existent, and even where it has been established, it is, save in one or two cases only, embryonic or very restricted in its purpose.<sup>1</sup>

The Trades Union Congress is the annual assembly of the Trade Unions, at which industrial and social questions affecting the working class are discussed. Any *bona fide* Union is entitled to be represented by delegates and to vote in accordance with its numerical strength. Membership of the Congress is not compulsory, and there are some Unions (including such important organisations as the Amalgamated Society of Engineers and the British Steel Smelters' Association) which are not affiliated; whilst since 1895 the Trades Councils have been excluded from participation, with the result that the democratic character and the efficiency both of the Trades Councils and Congress itself have been impaired. The total number of Trade Unionists represented at the last Congress (1913) was 2,232,446. The topics discussed cover a very wide field, but the Congress has no authority to enforce any decisions upon the individual Unions, and many resolutions which have been passed again and again (*e.g.* the condemnation of 'half

<sup>1</sup> See below, Chap. IX., for the Triple Alliance of miners and railwaymen and transport workers.

time' labour in the cotton mills) are consistently ignored by those principally concerned. The value of the Congress, of course, lies first in the opportunity afforded for debate, for exchange of opinion and for social intercourse, and secondly, in the appointment and instruction of its executive, the Parliamentary Committee. This body, consisting of sixteen members, with a paid secretary, elected annually by the whole assembly, is charged with the duties of watching all legislation directly affecting Labour, initiating such legislative action as the Congress may direct, and preparing the programme of the Congress. It also transacts all the necessary business between the Congresses, and is thus a supreme executive council of the Trade Union movement. In this capacity it often performs important functions, as, for instance, in its conduct of the arrangements for supplying food to those involved in the great Dublin lock-out in 1913. The political duties of the Parliamentary Committee, on the other hand, vital as they were originally, have diminished in importance since the rise of the Labour Party. In fact, there is such an overlapping that very little reason now exists for the continuance of the Parliamentary Committee—on its present basis, that is to say; for, as we shall see later, there is urgent need of a proper co-ordinating body at the head of the industrial movement. Some amount of concerted

action is secured by 'the Joint Board,' which consists of representatives of the Parliamentary Committee, the Labour Party and the General Federation of Trade Unions, meeting occasionally and as required. But this does not go to the root of the matter. •

The General Federation, like the Congress, aims at bringing together the whole of the Trade Unions, but with a different purpose. It was established, as we have already mentioned, in 1899, "to uphold the rights of Combination of Labour, to improve in every direction the general position and status of the Workers by the inauguration of a policy that shall secure to them the power to determine the economic and social condition under which they shall work and live, and to secure unity of action amongst all Societies forming the Federation . . . to promote Industrial Peace, and . . . to prevent strikes or lock-outs or disputes between trades . . . and where differences do occur, to assist in their settlement by just and equitable methods . . . and to establish a Fund for mutual assistance and support, and for carrying out the foregoing objects." Recently it has added to its functions by becoming an Approved Society under the National Insurance Act, dealing with a membership of about 100,000 men and 12,000 women. The General Federation "does not interfere in politics, except when legislation threatens the in-

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## TRADE UNION ORGANISATION 69

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terests of Trade Unions, and then only through the Parliamentary Committee of the Trade Union Congress and the Labour Party, whose political province it frankly recognises.” Its governing body is a General Council consisting of delegates appointed by affiliated organisations in proportion to their numbers. The General Council chooses each year a Management Committee of fifteen, who together with the Secretary, elected at the annual meeting, form the executive of the Federation. The contributions for each affiliated society are, “on the higher scale,” 4d., and “on the lower scale,” 2d. per member per quarter — (these contributions may be doubled “under exceptional circumstances” by the Management Committee). Benefits of 5s. or 2s. 6d. (on the higher and lower scales respectively) are allowed for any member involved in a strike or lock-out which is approved by the Federation.

Unfortunately the ideal of its founders has not yet been realised. “The old selfishness and jealousies,” as its Secretary says, “are not quite dead.” It is weak both financially and numerically. The drain on its funds has all along been heavy, largely owing to the eagerness of affiliated bodies to pay in as little as possible and take out as much as possible. In 1906 the contribution was reduced by one-third, and of late years its income has fallen below its expenditure. As regards members, it has risen from 43 societies with

343,000 members at its foundation to 158 societies with 901,678 in 1914. But this represents only a minority of the Trade Unionists of the country: even putting aside 700,000 miners, who consider themselves sufficiently served by their own Federation, there are a million and a half 'unfederated.' The feeling is growing in the Labour world that the Secretary is right in his complaint that the abstention of all these forces is a source of weakness, and that "by standing outside they prejudice themselves and prejudice the rest of the movement." In a later chapter we shall examine some of the proposals for the reorganisation of the forces at present dispersed in the General Federation, the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party. Here we may conclude with a brief summary of the main features of the Trade Union movement in Great Britain to-day, and an indication of the problems before it.

There are, as has been said, some four million Trade Unionists, grouped in about 1100 separate Unions,<sup>1</sup> with local branches amounting in the aggregate to scores of thousands. Geographically, the distribution of this Trade Unionism is uneven. It masses itself in the North rather than the South, and, of course, in the urban and not the rural districts. The strongest points are the coal-fields of the Northern (including the Scottish) and

<sup>1</sup> If Ireland is excepted, this figure will be reduced by about 100."

Midland counties and of South Wales, the textile area in Lancashire, the boot and shoe and hosiery districts in the Midlands, the shipyards of the Clyde, the Tyne and the Tees, and the big engineering and metal-working centres in different parts of the country. The building, printing and certain other trades are, naturally, more widely distributed.

The grand total of membership is more than double that of fifteen years ago. The increase has, it seems, been pretty general; one or two of the principal groups (*e.g.* bricklayers, masons, boot and shoe operatives) show an actual decrease in numbers between 1897 and 1911, but they have more than recovered since then. The most remarkable features of the last decade, however, have been the growth of the General Labour Unions, and the rapid extension of Trade Unionism in quarters where previously organisation had been practically unknown.

Among the lowest-paid workers the influence of the Trade Boards Act has been considerable. The creation of wages tribunals, including representatives of the workers, has given, in all the trades to which the Act has as yet been applied, a valuable stimulus to combination.<sup>1</sup> In the organisation of the sweated

<sup>1</sup> These trades are chain making, lace finishing, paper-box making, bespoke tailoring, hollow-ware making, sugar confectionery and food preserving, shirt making, linen embroidery. For an interesting illus-

women in these industries the Women's Trade Union League has been indefatigable. This League is not itself a Trade Union, but works for the promotion of Trade Unionism among women. It favours the combination of both sexes in the same Union wherever that is possible; but many women in miscellaneous trades, hitherto unorganised, are enrolled in the National Federation of Women Workers, which is, in effect, a general female Labour Union, and which has at the present time a membership of over 20,000.

The total of women organised in trades other than the textile and clothing rose in the ten years between 1901 and 1911 by over 460 per cent.; whilst even including the textile and clothing industries the rise was 122 per cent. Nevertheless, the organisation of the women, taken as a whole, is still weak. The number of women Trade Unionists in the Kingdom is now over 350,000,<sup>1</sup> nearly one-half of whom are cotton-weavers, while 75 per cent. are engaged in some branch of the textile industry. For the rest,

tration of the effects of the Act in the fustian trade in the Hebden Bridge district, see *Economic Journal*, September 1913, pp. 442 ff. The local branch of the Clothiers' Operatives' Union rose from 29 (male) members to over 300 in a few months. And cf. *Minimum Rates in the Chain-making Industry*, by R. H. Tawney (Bell, 1914).

At the beginning of 1921 there were sixty-two Trade Boards. A new Trade Boards Act, passed in 1918, has simplified and improved the procedure. Agriculture is covered by Agricultural Wages Boards (under the Corn Production Act, 1917) formed on the same principle.

<sup>1</sup> 357,956 in 1914. For later figures see below, Appendix. \*

there are Unions with a moderate female membership in the boot and shoe, tailoring, hat and cap, pottery, printing and paper, and cigar-making trades, and among shop assistants and in the public services. The chief obstacles to the better organisation of women are two—the one social and psychological, the other economic. As regards the first, the bulk of the women in industry only expect to be engaged for a certain number of years; normally they look forward to marriage withdrawing them from the factory or the workshop, and it is hard, therefore, to arouse or to maintain in them any appreciation of the advantages of Trade Unionism. As for the economic difficulty, it is the merest truism that the trades where wages are lowest are the most unorganised and the most unorganisable. But as conditions improve with the extension of the Trade Boards and the gradual raising of wages, we may expect this difficulty to grow less. The solution of the other will probably be found mainly in the spread and improvement of education which is already beginning to make itself felt among the women wage-earners.

If now we look below the surface of the Trade Union movement, we shall see that beside the great growth in numbers there exists a grave disunion—a disunion both in purpose and in structure. There is opposition between the Syndicalists and the Parliamentarians. There is serious difference of opinion



over the questions of arbitration and conciliation in trade disputes. There is, again, a lamentable degree of competition between similar Unions in the same industry, producing confusion, quarrels and discouragement. And among a large section there is open dissatisfaction with the government of the Unions, and a demand for greater popular control over officials. One need not, of course, look upon this internal unrest as altogether a bad thing—indeed, it is a healthy sign that the movement is beginning to face its problems. Of these the most obvious, since the total organised represents only a minority of the wage-earners,—albeit a minority which in energy and character far outweighs the inert majority,—is how to increase its numbers. But this, in so far as it is not simply a matter of slow and steady education, hinges in the main on another problem, the problem of how to consolidate the members who are already inside, how to unify and make an efficient fighting force of the present unwieldy host. Certain forms of this problem we have seen emerging from our survey—particularly the basis of organisation, whether it should be craft or industrial; the question of amalgamation or federation of existing craft unions; the conflict of bureaucracy and democracy, of centralisation and local autonomy. And last, but not least, there is the place of the Trade Unions in the State of the future—the part which

they are to play in the control of the national industry. All these questions we shall discuss presently ; but first, since their solution will largely depend on what we take to be the proper function and methods of Trade Unionism, we must proceed to examine those.

NOTE.—For the enormous growth in membership, the development of the amalgamation movement, and general changes in the organisation of the Trade Unions during and since the great war, see Chap. X. below.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE FUNCTION OF TRADE UNIONISM

Capital *versus* Labour—Industrial Peace—Labour Co-partnership—Compulsory Arbitration—Trade Unions as State Machinery.

THE function of Trade Unionism is generally defined as the protection and improvement of the workmen's standard of life. Every genuine Trade Union, from the London Leather Breeches Makers' Club in the eighteenth century to the gigantic Miners' Federation of Great Britain to-day, from the respectable Catholic *syndicat* of Belgium to the revolutionary French *Confédération Générale du Travail*, has set this end before itself. When, however, we come to ask exactly what is meant by the phrase "the improvement of the standard of life," we find that it covers enormous differences. The claims made on behalf of the workmen by the orthodox leaders of our day would have been repudiated as visionary extravagances, if not as scandalously immoral, by the orthodox leaders of fifty years ago; the view of Mr. Osborne that the mission of sane

Trade Unionism lies in "bringing capital and labour together and thus promoting that better understanding that is so essential to social peace,"<sup>1</sup> would excite nothing but derision in Mr. Tom Mann. The conception of the Trade Union, in fact, ranges from that of a useful means of raising wages and shortening hours in industry, to that of the sole instrument for the "abolition of capitalism and the wage system."

We have, then, two antagonistic theories, which may be called the 'war theory' and the 'peace theory.' The one is based on the philosophy of the Class Struggle, the other on the belief in, and desire for, immediate industrial peace. The first is the theory of the Socialist and Syndicalist Unions throughout the world; the second is the theory of the Christian and other anti-socialist working-class organisations of the Continent, and of most of the middle-class economists and politicians outside the Trade Union ranks both here and abroad. The history of the movement in this country (if we leave out of account the sudden and short flash of Syndicalism in the eighteen-thirties) shows a gradual progression from the second to the first—from the notion of the Trade Union as a combination of wage-earners struggling for rather more tolerable conditions of life, to the Socialist ideal of the complete emancipation of the working class. It is, of course, true

\* <sup>1</sup> See *Sound Trade Unionism*, by W. V. Osborne (Collins, 1913).

that very many British Trade Unionists to-day do not see any farther than a little more wages and a little less work. But it is also true that very few, if any, of them would deliberately refuse, if the opportunity were offered them, to push their standard beyond the limits laid down by the employing class and its supporters. And—what is the really important point—all the intelligent minds in the working class have now been driven to recognise pretty clearly the grim fact of the struggle of classes, and to see no end to it but through the ultimate victory of Labour over Capitalism.

We may take it, therefore, as the settled view of modern Trade Unionism that its proper function is to wage steady war on Capitalism (though not necessarily by constant strikes, as we shall see later), since Capitalism will always seek, if not to prevent any raising of the workmen's standard of life, at least to set definite bounds to it. We shall proceed presently to examine the practical rules with which the Unions entrench their standard, and the characteristic methods which they employ for the enforcement of those rules. But before we come to these, it is necessary to discuss briefly the opposing theory of 'industrial peace,' which holds so considerable a place in the mind of the general public.

The most optimistic among the advocates of this theory, whilst recognising, as do their opponents;

the brutality of the actual struggle between Capital and Labour, find the remedy, not in the triumph of the one over the other, but in the harmonising of their conflicting interests by establishing definite relations of partnership between the two. This is the device of Labour Co-partnership, which, in its most fully-developed form, proposes not merely to make the workmen in a particular business partners with their employers, but even to admit the Trade Unions to a regular place in the system.

Now Co-partnership<sup>1</sup> claims that it gives the workers, first, a greater share in the product of industry, and, secondly, a greater measure of control in the management. How far can this claim be substantiated? Theoretically, and at its best, it does give both, but in practice it gives very little of either, and that little only at a heavy price.<sup>2</sup> For Co-partnership, it must not be forgotten, is advocated as something beneficial to the employer as well as to the workman. The opportunity of increased earnings and the general improvement of his condition will stimulate the workman to a higher

<sup>1</sup> The Co-partnership criticised here is capitalistic Co-partnership, not that of the Co-operative Societies of Producers (for which see below p. 223 n.). The two things are really distinct, though often loosely coupled together.

<sup>2</sup> The extra share of profits received during the years 1901-11 by the workmen in Co-partnership businesses amounted to an average bonus of 5'5 per cent. on wages, or not much more than a ¼d. per hour !

efficiency in production; the *profits* of the business will be increased as well as the wages. And, in fact, in all the enterprises where Co-partnership has been introduced, the profits have probably been increased even more than the wages.

As to the control, this is effected by a certain number of the workmen's representatives being placed on the directorate of the business. But these are almost invariably in a minority—generally such a hopeless minority that they could not, even if they would, exert any serious influence in the management.<sup>1</sup> Thus the control which the work-

<sup>1</sup> In 1912 the Board of Trade published a Report on Profit Sharing and Labour Co-partnership in the United Kingdom (Cd. 6496), which showed that out of a total of 133 Profit-sharing and Co-partnership businesses only nine allowed representation of employees on the Board of Directors. Two of these businesses employed seven and eleven persons respectively. The largest of them, the South Metropolitan Gas Company, employing from 5000 to 6000 men, gives the worker shareholders two representatives on the Board of Directors. Incidentally, these two representatives must be persons who hold at least £120 stock of the Company, accumulated under the Co-partnership scheme, and who have been for not less than fourteen years in the employ of the Company—a restriction which should go far to ensure the election of 'safe' men! One firm, the Tollesbury and Mersea Oyster Fishing Company, lets the cat out of the bag by the frank statement of its Secretary that "our Co-partnership system cannot be termed satisfactory, as the dredgermen have control of the situation. The Board consists of twelve directors, six being supposed to represent the 'A' shareholders or capitalists, and six the 'B' shareholders or dredgermen. The latter, however, have secured a majority on the Board, and are able at times to dictate their views as to what work shall be done, and, consequently, what

man gets is generally illusory; whilst on the monetary side the system is little better than a fraud, for it is the worker's effort—his increased efficiency—which has increased the total output, say, by an extra ten per cent.—and of that extra ten per cent. he receives perhaps five per cent., while the other five per cent. goes into the employers' pockets.

Thus far, however, we have merely been considering the workmen as workmen. If we look at Co-partnership from the point of view of Trade Unionism, we shall see the difficulties in the way of its acceptance by organised Labour. The best known (and what are generally held to be the most successful) experiments in this form of profit-sharing—the South Metropolitan and other Gas Companies—have done much to weaken Trade Unionism among their employees—and have been opposed, naturally enough, on that very ground by the Trade Union movement.<sup>1</sup>

But, it may be asked, is such an antagonism inevitable? Mr. Aneurin Williams, the Honorary

amount shall be spent on wages, whereas from the financial standpoint and profitable working of the Company, it would perhaps be more beneficial for such work to be left undone, having regard to the heavy proportion the wages bear to the other expenditure of the Company."

See also a later Report in 1920 (Cd. 544), showing 182 schemes, with average bonus, etc., about the same as in 1912.



Secretary of the Labour Co-partnership Association, urges that it is not, though he frankly admits that "some employers have hoped by Profit-sharing and Co-partnership to detach their men from the Trade Union." He himself believes in Trade Unions, and indeed states emphatically that Trade Unionism is necessary for the workmen in Co-partnership businesses, since it alone can protect the standard rate, "without which Profit-sharing can hardly be anything but a delusion."<sup>1</sup>

In this he is certainly right, and we may assume for the sake of argument that he is right also in his contention that employers in Co-partnership concerns have no need to oppose Trade Unionism. But to say that Co-partnership may be favourable to the Trade Unions is not to prove that the Trade Unions ought to be favourable to Co-partnership. Here Mr. Williams entirely fails to make out his case. The

<sup>1</sup> Cp. the statement of Mr. Daniel Cameron, head of an Edinburgh building firm (quoted at p. 71 of Board of Trade Report on Profit Sharing): "The giving a bonus certainly promoted zeal and greater interest. But with some workers it promotes arrogance and a sense of over-importance and sometimes cheekiness. But to the prudent and discreet it makes better servants throughout and prevents the inclination to strike, and causes those who are getting a bonus to sever their connection with all Trade Unions, which is a great benefit to the employer." It is only fair to state that the South Metropolitan Gas Company has now withdrawn the ban which it formerly placed on the Gasworkers' Union, and a number of its men are, in fact, Trade Unionists. But this does not dispose of the fundamental objections.

Trade Unionist alleges that Co-partnership tends to shut the workman up in his own concern, to concentrate him, in fact, as a little capitalist, on the securing of his dividend. But, says Mr. Williams, other things beside Co-partnership—security of employment and the prospect of a pension in the public service, for instance, or an engagement under a generous employer—may easily weaken a man's allegiance to Trade Unionism. The Trade Unions do not oppose permanent employment by the State or municipality, or pensions or the existence of generous employers; why should they oppose Co-partnership? The answer is threefold. In the first place, the workers in the employment of the public or of generous employers do not, in fact, hold aloof, as do those in Co-partnership concerns, from Trade Unionism. Secondly, a co-partnership business is not on all fours with a State service or any 'comfortable berth' in private employ; a postman, for instance, is not a shareholder in the Post Office. And thirdly, the aim of Trade Unionism is not achieved when it has seen the postman established with a standard rate and a pension, or all its members working under generous employers. It looks to a very different organisation of the public services from what we have at present, and it looks to the complete elimination of the capitalist employer in the ideal form of industry. But Co-partnership purports to be itself

an ideal form of industry,<sup>1</sup> and it still retains the capitalist employer.

A good deal of light is thrown on the whole matter by the attempt recently made to introduce Co-partnership in the coal mines in France. In 1910 the French Government brought in a Bill in which it was proposed to make profit-sharing compulsory in any new mining concessions. This Bill was referred to a Parliamentary Committee, which found "that it was impossible to discuss a formula for profit-sharing which should be universally applicable to all mining undertakings." The miners, it appeared, though not very friendly to the principle, were willing to accept a *collective* system of profit-sharing, under which all mining undertakings should be "managed as to one-third by the holders of shares of money-capital, and as to two-thirds by the holders

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Industrial Co-partnership*, by Charles Carpenter, D.Sc., Chairman of South Metropolitan Gas Company. Dr. Carpenter says: "Co-partnership is put forward as being a solution of the labour problem far in advance of that possible under what is called collective ownership, each industry having its own colonies of workers contentedly endeavouring to improve their lot in life as well as to increase production. . . . Under Co-partnership we have now incontestable proof that antipathy between master and man dies down, and mutual respect and friendship takes its place. Trade Unions will then have no further need for their most cherished weapon, which they can afford to throw aside, and to journey side by side with the employers in a united pilgrimage towards the goal which they will seek, as they must always seek, in common, the triumph of their industry" (pp. 20 and 21).

of 'labour-capital,' these last being nominated by the Trade Union itself in private meeting." The mine-owners, not unnaturally, looked with a cold eye upon such a proposal; for if it did not end, as they claimed it would, in the ruin of the mining industry, it would certainly end in the extinction of the mine-owners! But the Miners' Federation did not stop even there. At their Congress of 1911 a resolution was carried declaring that profit-sharing would be only a snare unless accompanied by the following requirements, both in new and existing concessions — the minimum wage, the eight-hours' day, benefit funds to be supported entirely out of owners' profits, workmen's houses to be built on every concession and let at the lowest possible rents, improvement and better administration of the laws relating to sanitation, safety appliances and accidents. "In view of this marked divergence of views," as it was rather naïvely put, one is not surprised to find that the Parliamentary Committee did not recommend that profit-sharing should be made compulsory.<sup>1</sup>

But some of the apostles of Co-partnership are optimistic enough to think that, if they cannot overcome the workmen's scruples by merely holding out the hand of friendship to the Trade Unionists, they may succeed better by putting a coin in the hand!

<sup>1</sup> See Board of Trade Report on Profit-sharing and Labour Co-partnership Abroad (Cd. 7283), 1914, pp. 116 ff.

It has recently been suggested,<sup>1</sup> for instance, that since it is futile to expect a change in the Unions' attitude "until it is to the leaders' interest and personal profit to promote peace rather than strife between masters and men," these leaders should be put "as the men's representatives on the Boards of the larger concerns, and should draw the usual fees for their work as Directors of the Company." They would thus, it is ingenuously argued, "have a fixed income which would not be dependent upon their ability to produce discord. As directors of large industrial companies they would learn to understand some of the difficulties of conducting on paying lines . . . and would gain an intimate knowledge of business methods, business risks and business profits." It is not necessary to waste time in criticising this unblushing proposal to buy the Trade Union officials; but the preposterous suggestion shows how hard it is for many well-intentioned middle-class people to grasp the meaning of Trade Unionism. The very basis of the Co-partnership system is opposed to the Trade Union fundamentals of the 'common rule and the solidarity of the working class. As Professor W. J. Ashley has said, "profit-sharing and Trade Unionism rest on two mutually exclusive principles and involve two incompatible policies. Profit-sharing

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<sup>1</sup> See article in the *Fortnightly Review*, December 1913, "The Future Relations of Capital and Labour," by John B. C. Kershaw.

assumes a community of interest between employer and employed in each particular business, Trade Unionism between all the workmen in the trade against all the employers in the trade.”<sup>1</sup>

There is, however, another section, which, unable to repose much faith in voluntary Co-partnership, and yet anxious to secure peace at any price, looks to the intervention of the State to put down industrial warfare by express prohibition of strikes, while offering redress of grievances through Compulsory Arbitration Courts. This prohibition of strikes is applied in certain countries to State employees, such as railway and postal servants, and the method of compulsory arbitration has been tried in Australasia and other parts of the British Empire, though not, as we shall see hereafter, with very great success.

Between these two extremes—the respective advocates of peace by persuasion and peace by compulsion—lies the main body, who, as one would expect in this country, are simply opportunists, recognising the value and even the necessity of Trade Unionism, but without any clear idea of its real meaning or of its future. They are concerned chiefly, as practical persons, in seeing that the Trade Unions do not go too far or too fast, and naturally enough they find in the principles of conciliation or voluntary arbitration the most obvious means of

<sup>1</sup> See *Quarterly Review*, October 1913, pp. 509 ff.

'keeping the peace.' These principles, which are really developments of that important method of Trade Unionism known as Collective Bargaining, we shall discuss in their proper place.<sup>1</sup>

But there is another recent development, which, though it does not ostensibly imply any definite point of view about industrial peace, may be most conveniently noted here, since it has some bearing on the function of Trade Unionism. This is, to put it in one word, the tendency to make the Unions a part of the machinery of the State. It first appeared in France in the early eighteen-eighties, with the establishment of Bourses du Travail under the auspices of the municipalities. Later came the Ghent system of publicly subsidising the unemployed funds of the Trade Unions. In this country the public Labour Exchanges scheme (first started in London under the Unemployed Workmen Act, 1905) gave official recognition to the Trade Unions by inviting them to keep their vacant books at the Exchange. Since then the National Insurance Act has gone a step further. Part II. of the Act assigns considerable duties as well as rights to the Unions in the management of the unemployment funds, whilst Part I. allows them to become Approved Societies for the administration of sickness benefit, and gives them a still more important status, though

<sup>1</sup> See below, Chap. VI.

at the same time it greatly impairs the value of that status by permitting the capitalist Assurance Companies to enter into competition with them.

These privileges, it seems, have not been granted by the legislature with any *arrière pensée*; they are purely opportunist arrangements. They are regarded with varied feelings in the Trade Union movement. The great mass, no doubt, accepts the position in much the same uncritical spirit in which it is offered. The militants, who do not wish to see the Class Struggle blurred, do not like it, while others find in it an advantageous opportunity of widening the scope and authority of Trade Unionism.<sup>1</sup>

It is, indeed, not difficult to see that if this tendency were pushed on logically—(beginning, say, with the giving of definite functions to the Unions in the spheres of technical education and of factory inspection, to take two obvious instances)—it might result presently in an enormous enhancement of Trade Unionism—ultimately, no doubt, in compulsory Trade Unionism, and a supplanting, partial if not entire, of the State official, on the one hand, and of the capitalist employer himself, on the other, by the organised associations of producers. Of course, it would be absurd to pretend that there is any sign of such a development at present.<sup>1</sup> The tendency is

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<sup>1</sup> But see Chap. XI. for developments in the direction of 'workers' control' both in this country and abroad.



as yet nothing but a tendency, and since the minds of the responsible politicians and administrators seem to be untroubled by any theories about it, it is quite likely that it may advance no further. And in any case it is hardly probable that these politicians and administrators, if they did begin to theorise, would favour such a development as we have suggested, even were the Trade Unions on their side willing to take the risks involved in it.<sup>1</sup>

We must now return to the definition with which we opened this chapter. That definition, as we have seen, covers, in its ultimate analysis, widely divergent aims. But for the moment it is substantially true that all Trade Unions are engaged in the struggle to protect and raise the standard of life of the working class against the encroachments of Capitalism. Their immediate concern is necessarily with the practical details of wages, hours and conditions of labour, security or continuity of employment. And our task now is to see, first, how in general they frame the issues, and secondly, what are the weapons which they use in their struggle.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Unemployment and Trade Unions*, by Cyril Jackson, pp. 85-88, etc.

## CHAPTER V

### TRADE UNION REGULATIONS

Standard Rates and Hours—Conditions of Work—Security of Employment—Restriction of Entry to the Trade—Apprenticeship and Boy Labour—The Competition of Women—Demarcation Disputes.

THE Trade Union regulations relating to the various heads of wages, hours, conditions of work and security of employment, represent the attempt to apply as far as possible a ‘common rule,’ not merely in this or that shop or factory or mine, but throughout the craft or industry. And the most important applications of this common rule are seen in the establishment of standard rates of wages and standard hours of labour.

The standard remuneration which every Union demands for its members is a minimum rate below which none may work. It is not a maximum, for in many cases higher wages are paid to specially skilled workmen, sometimes by express agreement between the employer and the Union.<sup>1</sup> The standard rate

<sup>1</sup> Occasionally also, under strictly defined conditions, the Trade Unions will allow old men to work below the standard rate.

may take the form either of a time or of a piece-work rate. About two-thirds of the Trade Unionists actually insist on piece-work, whilst fifty per cent. of those who recognise time-work will accept a piece-work basis also. It is obvious, therefore, that the Trade Unions as a whole make no claim to equal wages for all; the principle asserted is simply that of equal pay for equal effort, which is clearly consistent with quite unequal weekly earnings even for men on precisely similar jobs.<sup>1</sup>

The reason for the preference of time-work to piece-work, or *vice versa*, is to be found in the nature and special circumstances of each trade, and the determining factor is always, broadly speaking, the greater effectiveness of the one or the other in protecting the standard. The piece-work system, to put it in one word, is in many industries the only real barrier against 'speeding-up'—against the

<sup>1</sup> This is sufficient answer, if answer be needed, to the absurd allegation sometimes made that Trade Unionism endeavours to reduce all to the level of the most inefficient or lazy. As for the highly controversial question of the ethics of remuneration—(whether every man ought to be paid according to his ability and his output, or whether it is not the more equitable principle to reward the quick and the slow equally, provided only that both are equally industrious and conscientious)—it is not necessary to discuss that here. It is worth while, however, to remind the reader that the latter principle is applied in the Civil Service, the Army and the Navy, the scholastic profession, etc. etc., and that it is accepted there without question by those who cry out the loudest against its application to the manual workers.

employer's power, that is to say, to drive the workman to the utmost limits of his endurance, and so, in effect, by overworking him to reduce the standard rate. The cotton and the boot and shoe operatives have found it necessary to protect themselves in this way against the machinery which they manipulate. And similarly the coal-miners in former days could only prevent the exactions of the butty-man by insisting on piece-work for all hewers.<sup>1</sup>

The various Unions in the building industry, on the other hand, the Carpenters and Joiners, Bricklayers, Stone Masons or Painters, favour a time-work basis. For here it is not a matter of constantly repeating an identical process, as in coal-getting, boot-making or cotton-spinning. Every job differs in a greater or less degree from every other, so that under a piece-work system a new contract would have to be made on each occasion, and a uniform standard rate would become impossible. The engineering trade is for the most part in the same position, and the Amalgamated Society of Engineers admits piece-work only in a strictly guarded way. Their 'Terms of Settlement' lay it down that piece-

<sup>1</sup>Under the butty or charter-master system the practice was to let out different parts of the mine to working contractors, who hired the coal-hewers to work with and under them. The butty-master, who paid his gang a daily time wage, and himself set the pace, would naturally always have an interest in speeding-up the hewers, since the faster they worked, the better would his own profits be.

work may be allowed provided that—(a) prices are fixed by actual arrangement between the employer and the man or men performing the work ; (b) each workman's day rate is guaranteed irrespective of his piece-work earnings ; and (c) overtime and night-shift allowances are paid in addition to piece-work prices, on the same conditions as already prevail in each workshop for time-work. A similar slight relaxation is found occasionally in the building trade. Thus the Manchester and Salford District Stone Masons agree with the employers—"no piece-work to be introduced, but ornamental carving, turning small columns, balusters and the like, may be done by contract, but the roughing out of the same to be done by day work."

In other trades, such as printing, piece and time rates exist side by side. The compositors' work is such that there is little danger of their being 'speeded-up' under the one system, and little difficulty in pricing each job under the other. Certain classes of work accordingly are usually done on a time-wage—*e.g.* 'authors' corrections' and 'clearing away' (*i.e.* taking away head and white lines). But the setting up of the London morning and evening newspapers is piece-work.<sup>1</sup> And an

<sup>1</sup> 'Fudge,' however (*i.e.* matter specially set to fit a small contrivance attached to the printing machine for inserting 'Stop Press News' in the evening papers), is worked on a time basis—at a minimum rate of 1s. 3d. per hour.

agreement covering the whole of the country (except London) for working the Monotype keyboard provides both for time-wages and piece-work, though the great bulk of the work is done on time-wages. The boilermakers, again, practise both systems; a good deal of the work in the shipyards is done by groups or squads, of which the leading members (*e.g.* riveters and holders-up) are paid piece-rates and the subordinates (*e.g.* rivet-heaters) a fixed weekly wage. A large number of dock labourers, too, are employed at piece rates, calculated by the weight or measurement of the cargoes handled, and very elaborate lists of prices are in force among the grain-porters, coal-trimmers, timber-porters and other sections.<sup>1</sup>

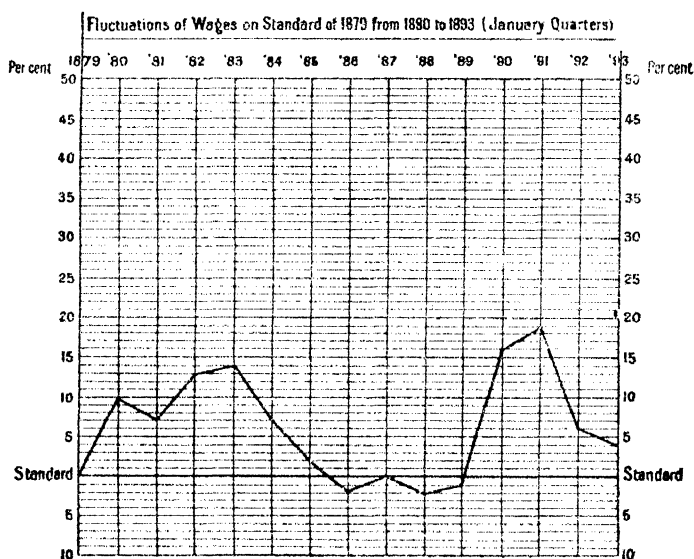
There is, however, another form of the standard rate which must be noticed. The blast-furnacemen, puddlers, forgers, etc., in the iron and steel trades, as well as a few iron and lime-stone quarrymen and miners—probably some 60,000 or 70,000 men in all—have their wages regulated by what is known as a Sliding Scale. A certain ‘standard’ or ‘basis’ of remuneration is fixed, based on a ‘net average selling price’ of the product, and according as the actual selling price, which is ascertained at regular intervals

<sup>1</sup> See Report of Departmental Committee on the Checking of Piecework Wages in Dock Labour, 1908 [Cd. 4380], and Minutes of Evidence [Cd. 4381]. And cf. Report on Collective Agreements, 1910 [Cd. 5366].

by chartered accountants, rises above or falls below that basic price, so the earnings rise above or fall below the 'standard' rate. Thus in the case of the Cleveland blast-furnacemen the 'standard' rate of

### CLEVELAND BLAST-FURNACEMEN, 1880-1893

#### SLIDING SCALE

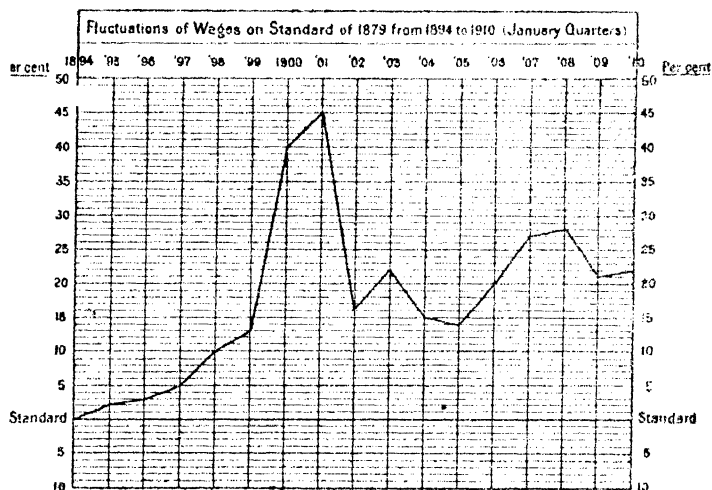


wages is taken to correspond to a selling price of 34s. a ton. If the price falls, percentages are deducted from the workmen's pay at the rate of .25 on the 'standard' wage for every drop in price of 2.4d. per ton. And similarly, if the selling price goes up, the earnings go up in the same ratio. The

## TRADE UNION REGULATIONS 97

remarkable irregularities of earnings which this system produces may be seen from the accompanying curves, showing the fluctuations of wages on the 'standard' of 1879.<sup>1</sup>

### CLEVELAND BLAST-FURNACEMEN FROM 1894-1910 SLIDING SCALE



In the iron and steel works in the Midlands the principle is much the same, though the actual method of calculation is slightly different. A

<sup>1</sup> The wages fluctuate not, only year by year, but quarter by quarter, and large variations occur during the twelve months. Thus in 1886 the wage from January to March was 1·25 per cent. below the standard, but in April it fell to 6·25 per cent. below. A new standard was adopted in Cleveland in 1919. In October, 1920, the wages were 163½ per cent. above this standard.



puddler gets a wage which works out at 1s. for each £1 per ton selling price (with a fraction of a shilling corresponding to a fraction of a pound), plus a fixed premium of 2s. 3d. on every ton produced. Thus, with iron selling at £8 per ton, the wage rate will be 8s. plus 2s. 3d. premium—or 10s. 3d. During the last twenty years the rate has fluctuated between 11s. 3d. and 7s. 3d. per ton. In some cases a minimum, and also a maximum, is fixed, and the scale then slides between these two points. With the Scottish blast-furnacemen, for instance, “15 per cent. above the ‘basis rate’ is the minimum wage, although Pig Iron should fall to a lower price,” and the maximum is 55 per cent. above the basis, “although Pig Iron should rise to a higher price.” This system, of course, simply amounts to a chance bonus, proportioned not to effort on the workman’s part, but to the demand of the market. The ordinary form of ‘bonus on output’ is found in the case of a number of day men working in the Welsh sheet-mills. These men are subordinate to the principal operatives, and receive a fixed time-wage, plus a bonus on the amount earned ‘per shift per mill.’

Now this device of the Sliding Scale, it will be seen, while it maintains the principle of the ‘common rule,’ is based on an acceptance of the theory that

‘supply and demand’ should determine the worker’s remuneration. That is a theory which, whatever its popularity may at one time have been, is now very properly rejected by the Trade Union world as a whole. It does, in fact, as Mr. and Mrs. Webb have pointed out in *Industrial Democracy*, put the workman in “the position of a humble partner,” entitled to a share in the product of the industry—but a partner without any voice in the management of the business, unable to exercise any control in the adjustment of the supply to the demand. And it was the recognition of this fact which, more than anything else, led the miners and others who formerly worked under it, to abandon the Sliding Scale. The accepted view now is that the workman’s income must not depend on profits and prices, but that a living wage should be the first charge on every industry.

The Unions, then, aim at the enforcement of a uniform standard rate. But, in fact, nothing like national uniformity is achieved, or for the most part even attempted. There are large local variations in the standard rate. The following table, for instance, shows the standard wages and hours in 1913 of carpenters in six South-Western towns:<sup>1</sup>—

<sup>1</sup> See Board of Trade Report on Standard Time Rates [Cd. 7194], 1913.

Town.	Wage per hour.	Normal working hours per week.	Earnings if working full week.
Barnstaple	6d.	56	28s.
Bridgwater	6½d.	58	31s. 5d.*
Exeter	7½d.	53½	33s. 5½d.
Penzance	6½d.	55	28s. 7¾d.
Plymouth	8½d.	53	37s. 6½d.
Taunton	7d.	56½	32s. 11½d.

Nor do the variations correspond merely to differences in the cost of living from town to town. In many cases, indeed, there seems to be but little relation between the two. Here, for example, is a comparison of the standard rates of hand compositors working on weekly newspapers (together with the cost of living) in a number of Northern towns.<sup>1</sup>

Town.	Weekly Wage.	Cost of Living (calculated as percentage of London).
Manchester	38s.	88
Newcastle	37s.	95
Jarrow	37s.	93

<sup>1</sup> See Reports on Standard Time Rates [Cd. 7194], 1913, and Cost of Living of the Working Classes [Cd. 6955], 1913.

# TRADE UNION REGULATIONS 101

Town.	Weekly Wage.	Cost of Living (calculated as percentage of London).
Leeds	37s.	87
Bolton	36s.	87
Sheffield	35s.	87
Bradford	34s.	90
Middlesbro'	34s.	91
Rochdale	34s.	89
Stockport	33s. 9d.*	86
Barrow-in-Furness	33s.	93
Hull	33s.	87
Halifax	32s. 6d.	88
Carlisle	32s.	90
Darlington	32s.	91
Macclesfield	31s.	81
Keighley	30s.*	89

\* Jobbing rate.

\* To account exactly for these variations (where the cost of living is ruled out) would be impossible without minute inquiry into every case. They are clearly not attributable to differences in efficiency; even if the compositors of London or Manchester are superior in general to those of Macclesfield, the

argument can hardly apply, say, to Darlington and Middlesbro', or Leeds and Bradford. The principal cause, no doubt, is weak Trade Union organisation in the lower-paid places. But besides this there are numerous minor causes special to particular localities. The case of the compositors, which has just been referred to, for instance, is partially explained, according to an official of the Typographical Association, by the fact that while some newspapers "have a monopoly value and considerable profits, others are kept running for political reasons at a very small profit, or even at a loss, and therefore claim that it is not possible to pay higher wages." Much again depends on the local shape, so to speak, of the industry. Where there is a multiplicity of firms it is far easier for the workmen to exact better terms than where the whole of the trade is in the hands of two or three or perhaps of a single employer, and the only alternative to accepting the rates offered is to leave the town. And finally there are psychological reasons—strong personalities on the one side or the other, and, to quote the same Trade Union official again, "the workmen's loyalty\* to employers and general desire for a quiet life."

But, to whatever they may be due, these varying standards have obvious inconveniences and dangers, and it is a little surprising that the Unions as a whole have not made more strenuous efforts to

‘level-up all round.’ Occasionally, as in coal mining, a uniform County or District rate has been secured, and there seems to be no good reason why this should not be extended into other industries. The proposal, which we shall discuss later, to make collective agreements between Trade Unions and employers in any trade binding throughout a district over the whole of that trade,<sup>1</sup> would doubtless, if it could be carried out, have a considerable effect in this direction. It has been suggested, too, that in many trades a definite national rate should be established, with percentages added or deducted to balance differences in local prices and rents (though the Unions should certainly not ‘temper the wind to the shorn lamb’ by making allowances for inferior machinery or other disadvantages, real or alleged, of weak employers). Pretty accurate official computations of the cost of living in different parts of the country have already been made, and they might with very little trouble be worked out for the whole Kingdom. If the Unions pursued such a policy they would, of course, not only improve the position of their members in places where the standard rate is clearly too low, but they would at the same time check the serious danger to the standard rates in the higher-paid districts which results from the competition of the lower-paid. The practical objection is

<sup>1</sup> See below, p. 148.

that this necessitates a very high degree of organisation, and the example of a trade like that of the Silk Hatters (who have a uniform price list to which 10 per cent. is added in London) is hardly conclusive, since the Union includes practically every operative in the craft.<sup>1</sup>

The normal working-day may be regarded from two points of view. In the first place, the establishment of a definite minimum of leisure is clearly a good in itself—vital to the physical, mental and moral welfare of the worker.<sup>2</sup> In all the struggles waged by the Trade Unions for a shortening of hours this ideal has, of course, been present: some-

<sup>1</sup> The American Unions have given more attention to this question of uniformity of rates. The Granite Cutters, Garment Workers, Coopers, Stove Mounters and others have national standard time-rates, which are intended to be minimum rates to be observed by the local Unions in fixing their standards; whilst some have established State minimum rates with the same object. Some Unions have even stood out resolutely for a uniformity which should take no account of difference in cost of living, but in practice this is rarely possible. See *The Standard Rate in American Trade Unions*, by David H. McCabe, Ph.D. (Baltimore, 1912).

<sup>2</sup> Thus, to give a striking illustration, in 1911 in the Durham and Cleveland iron industry, there were about 10 per cent. of the blast-furnacemen working twelve hours a day, as against the eight hours worked by the majority. Investigations made in a large Trade Union branch showed that the twelve-hour men drew 75 per cent. more sick-pay than those working eight hours, despite the fact that the latter were doing heavier work. Over the whole district the death-rate among the twelve-hour men was out of all proportion greater than among the eight-hour men.

times—as in the ‘early closing’ demands of the shop assistants, or in the energetic campaign for ‘la semaine anglaise’ (the Saturday half-holiday), which the whole Trade Union movement in France is now conducting—it is the dominant consideration. But in the second place, a regular number of hours is essential to the maintenance of the standard rate itself. Manifestly the length of the working day is a definite factor in the wage-bargain for all who are employed at time-rates, and recent cases are recorded by the Amalgamated Society of Engineers where employers have actually resisted a demand for reduced hours on the ground that their men’s wages have been fixed by agreement for a certain period, and that the reduction would be tantamount to an increase of wages and was consequently an illegitimate claim. With piece-rate workers the point is less obvious, since it would seem that longer hours must here mean higher earnings. But this, in fact, is to forget that longer hours also mean greater strain on the worker,<sup>1</sup> and will presently, as experience has shown again and again, tell upon the weaker operatives; whilst the very fact of the weekly wages, as judged by the earnings of the

<sup>1</sup> A series of scientific experiments conducted by Professor Abbé, of the Zeiss Optical Works, Jena, covering two hundred and fifty-three processes, showed that a 4 per cent. larger output was obtained in an eight-hours’ day than had previously been obtained in nine hours, though exactly the same machines were used.



strongest and quickest workers, at once rising above the customary level, will eventually be used by the employer as an excuse for cutting down the rate. On the other hand, it has been proved over and over again that a reduction of hours does not tend to reduce either output or wages. Among the blast-furnacemen in districts where eight-hour shifts are worked, wages are 25 to 30 per cent. higher than where there are twelve-hour shifts. The introduction of the forty-eight hours' week in the Royal Small Arms Factory at Enfield, affecting nearly 2000 piece-workers, caused no reduction in output or earnings. And in Victoria an all-round lessening of hours to forty-eight per week was accompanied by large increases of wages (*e.g.* from 27s. 7d. to 33s. 8d. in the boot trade; from 15s. 8d. to 18s. 3d. for women in the clothing trade; from 27s. 8d. to 34s. 5d. for saddlers). Sound theory and practical experience alike, therefore, have proved the importance of 'shorter hours,' and substantial reductions in the working day have been won by the Unions in almost all the chief industries.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In the generation preceding the war the average reduction in most of the skilled trades amounted to eight or ten hours per week. The normal day of the miners and the textile workers, obtained by legislation, and the lowering of the gasworkers' hours from twelve to eight per day in the great strikes of 1889, are instances which will readily occur to the reader. After the war a great reduction of hours was made throughout industry. By 1920 the '48-hour week' (and often less) was pretty general.

The normal day is seriously impaired by two very common practices in the industrial world. The first of these is the working of overtime. The Trade Unionists have always recognised the evil of this, and have struggled steadily to restrict if not to abolish it. It is, of course, penalised in a general way by agreements that all hours beyond the standard shall be paid for at a higher rate—‘time and a quarter,’ ‘time and half,’ or even ‘double time.’ But these penalties have unhappily often proved an incentive to the workmen to desire overtime, while they have not been sufficient to deter the employers from continuing it, and even making a system of it. Secondly, there is the constant tendency to ‘speed-up.’ ‘Speeding-up’ is, of course, a natural instinct in employers engaged in a fierce competitive struggle, and it has recently been elaborated by American genius into a scientific system.<sup>1</sup> That there is a great deal of feeble work and wasted exertion in industry to-day is undeniable. Nevertheless the fact remains that speeding-up, as generally practised, is a robbery of the workmen. For, if an employer can justly claim that shorter hours are equivalent to higher wages, since they mean less output and less effort for the same remuneration,

<sup>1</sup> See *The Principles of Scientific Management*, by F. W. Taylor, and other books, of which a list is given in the Bibliography below. A concise criticism will be found in G. D. H. Cole's *Payment of Wages*, ch. viii.

then the workman on his side is entitled to say that harder hours mean lower wages, since they mean a greater output and greater effort with no extra reward. The Trade Union naturally tries to resist this overdriving, but the difficulty of checking it—sometimes even of detecting it—is enormous. •

The general conditions of employment can, like the normal day, be reduced to terms of the standard rate, since the sanitation of a workshop, the state of the machinery, the riskiness or unpleasantness of a job, must properly be taken into account in estimating the worth of the workman's earnings. The Trade Unions have, therefore, always fought in one way or another for the amenities, the health and the lives of their members, and the vast majority of workers do now enjoy some measure—though by no means an adequate measure—of protection. The reader will easily recall the bulky code of Factory legislation: the Workmen's Compensation Act; the load-line regulations of the Merchant Shipping Acts; the statutes providing for the safety of miners and quarrymen and railway servants, for the prohibition of white phosphorous matches, for seats for shop assistants. • Besides this volume of legislative protection, the Unions often have bye-laws of their own for the same purpose. Thus, the Boilermakers demand that a certificate of safety shall be given

before a man is put onto certain classes of repairing work in the shipyards; the Potters insist that no 'ovenmen' shall be forced to work in a temperature over 120°; and many of the building trades' Unions require the employer to provide places for shelter against weather and for safety for tools.

Last, but not least in importance, there is the task of maintaining the greatest possible security of employment for the worker. Unemployment is one of the chief dangers which threaten the standard of life, and it is also under modern industrial conditions the hardest to cope with. The unemployed destitute workman, faced with the alternative of starvation or a job at any wage, is obviously the most direct menace to the standard rate and to Trade Unionism itself, and it is the recognition of this fact, as we shall see presently, which has led the Unions to attach such importance to their out-of-work benefit, and to support so energetically the palliative measures—generally relief works of a more or less unsatisfactory character—which Parliament and the municipalities have from time to time decreed. But insurance and relief works are at best only negative ways of promoting continuity of employment—or rather they are tacit confessions of failure to secure it at all. Here and there, however, the Trade Unions have made certain positive regulations, which, though they do not go very far, are

of some interest. These fall under four main heads. First, we find the demand that the employer, in engaging a man, shall guarantee him a certain minimum period of work and pay him wages for that period, whether he is at work or not. Thus the Flint-Glass Makers insist on a minimum of thirty-three hours per week, and the compositors in London newspaper offices are similarly entitled to a guaranteed daily minimum of work or corresponding wages in the alternative. At the docks, where disorganisation and greed and stupidity have condemned a vast army of men to the constant miseries of under-employment, the Unions have for long struggled for some regularisation. The Dock, Wharf and Riverside Workers' Union many years ago demanded that any man taken on at the London Docks should be guaranteed four hours' continuous work. And recently the National Union of Dock Labourers has assisted heartily in the attempt initiated by the Labour Exchange to decasualise the Liverpool Docks. Secondly, there are rules in certain Unions (*e.g.* Brushmakers, Compositors, Saddlers) prohibiting the members of the Union from engrossing more than a normal day's work, or from working for a second employer after putting in the ordinary day. But these regulations are obviously only a form of the provision against overtime which is general throughout the Trade Union movement. The idea which

underlies them, however, of mitigating the workers' insecurity by sharing the work round, is sometimes carried a stage further, so that we find a third type of positive regulation in the claim for 'distribution of work' to meet a depression of trade or seasonal slackness. Thus, among a large section of the tailors, who are subject to serious fluctuations, it is required that "during slack seasons a fair equitable division of trade should be compulsory in all shops." And similar stipulations are made in the glass-bottle industry. In Lancashire, if a furnace is put out owing to trade depression, an additional furnace may not be started within three months, unless half wages are paid to the men who have been stopped, for the time they have lost; while in Yorkshire the men displaced by a furnace being put out are to be allowed "as far as practicable to share work." The same principle, too, has for long been applied regularly in the coal and cotton industries—and occasionally in others—in a slightly different form, by the shortening of the working hours all round, so as to avoid the dismissal of any individual workmen during the period of stagnant trade.

Finally, we have "an altogether different class of regulation, in the attempt to obtain security of employment by strictly limiting the number of workmen in the trade. Historically, this restriction of

numbers is the first and most essential function of the Unions, and if we were dealing with the Trade Unionism of a hundred or even fifty years ago, we should have had to give to apprenticeship the most prominent place among its regulations. Formerly, when the Wages Fund theory held sway, to limit numbers naturally seemed the only way of maintaining the workmen's standard of life. But now that theory is dead, and, moreover, the constant revolutionising of processes in modern industry makes apprenticeship practically impossible in many trades. It has, therefore, as every student of economics knows, ceased to be of much service either to the employer or to the community, and consequently its value to the Trade Unions also has greatly diminished. In point of fact, a large majority of the Unions, including the cotton operatives and miners, as well as the huge transport and general labour organisations, allow entrance to the trades without any restriction at all. Yet apprenticeship does still figure in many industries. Collective agreements for its regulation are in force in the building and furnishing and printing trades, among engineers, boilermakers, shipwrights, ship-painters, ironfounders, farriers, tailors, saddlers, bakers, coopers, glass-bottle makers and others.<sup>1</sup> But when

<sup>1</sup> See Board of Trade Report on Collective Agreements, 1910 [Cd. 5366], pp. 432 ff.

we look into the working of these agreements, we find that they seldom succeed in keeping the trade closed.<sup>1</sup> Despite strenuous efforts made by the Unions to maintain the effectiveness of their restrictive regulations, the developments of industry have generally been too much for them. The Amalgamated Society of Engineers, for instance, has been faced by an enormous disintegration of the old handicraft. With the constant introduction of new machines and the ease with which a man passes from one to another, it has become practically impossible to distinguish machine-minders who are

<sup>1</sup> An inquiry made a few years ago showed that in forty-one typical firms in the building industry in London, with 12,000 employees, there were only 80 apprentices and 143 learners. The proper proportion, if the regulations were strictly kept, would have been 1600. Often the Unions do not aim any longer at restricting numbers. (See cases quoted in Board of Trade Reports on Collective Agreements. The Birmingham Bricklayers' Agreement, *e.g.*, to take one instance at random, imposes no limit on the number of apprentices, though requiring all boys to be legally bound to the trade before the age of seventeen.) Even the Boilermakers, whom Mr. and Mrs. Webb were able to cite twenty years ago as the one really important Union which still maintained apprenticeship in its old integrity, agreed in 1901 with the Shipbuilding Employers' Federation that there should be no limitation in the number of apprentices employed (in the North-East Coast yards), though the employers conceded "that it is not their intention to overstock yards with apprentices, and if the Boilermakers' Society finds it necessary to prefer a complaint respecting the number of apprentices, this must be done through the secretaries of the Shipbuilding Employers' Federation." In other shipyards, however, as at Cardiff, Barry, Southampton and Liverpool, a specific ratio of apprentices to journeymen (one to three or four) is agreed upon.



'engineers' from those who are merely 'labourers,'<sup>1</sup> and the old policy of excluding the unapprenticed workman as an 'illegal man' has long been given up as useless.

Even in those few small and select crafts where apprenticeship has lingered longest, it is gradually decaying. Compulsory apprenticeship is enforced, for instance, among the painters' brushmakers in London, but it is almost dead in the same trade in Birmingham. And a similar fate has overtaken it in others of the Birmingham handicrafts, such as jewellery, sporting gun and rifle making, electroplating and the glass trades. In the Sheffield cutlery industry the old system of 'patrimony'<sup>2</sup> is still maintained to some extent. Under this pseudo-apprenticeship the Razor Hafters, Table Knife Forgers, Scythe Grinders, and various other societies permit no boys to enter the trade except the sons of members, and the lads when they do enter are apprenticed not to a capitalist master but to the

<sup>1</sup> Though in this country the sanctity of the lathe proper (*i.e.* not capstan or automatic lathes) has been preserved. Only a recognised 'engineer,' who has been through an apprenticeship, can work it.

<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to notice that this 'patrimony' is practised also by certain Unions in the U.S.A. The Table Knife Grinders and the National Window Glass Workers, for instance, make relationship a strict qualification for apprenticeship, while other Unions give a preference to sons of journeymen. Generally speaking, however, in America as here, very few Unions are able effectively to regulate apprenticeship. See *Admission to American Trade Unions*, by F. E. Wolfe, Ph.D. (Baltimore, 1912).

journeymen themselves. But it is to be observed that the number of these apprentices is not very narrowly restricted: each journeyman may have an apprentice of his own, and sometimes the rules allow a father to introduce all his sons to the craft. And it seems likely that another decade or two will see the end even of this survival.

But however little one may regret the passing of apprenticeship, unsuited as it is to modern industry, it is impossible to be satisfied with the system—or rather want of system—that has taken its place. The unlimited supply of cheap untrained boy labour that is open to employers to-day is disastrous to the skilled journeymen, to the youths themselves and to the community. The Trade Unions have struggled energetically, but without much success, to restrict the evil. The number of juveniles can sometimes be kept down in districts where Trade Unionism is strong, and in classes of work where skilled workers are essential. But little can be done by the Unions to touch the low-grade shops and the small employers. The true remedy, as is now pretty clearly recognised, is not the limitation of the number of boys who shall be employed in a particular trade, but of the hours and conditions of their work. A system prohibiting the employment of young persons under 18 for more than twenty-four hours a week, and devoting them for another twenty-four

hours to the continuance of their education, would go far to solve more than one serious problem.

Into the much debated question of the competition of women with men in industry we cannot go in detail here. There is a certain number of women employed not merely in the same trades with men, but on precisely similar work, and there is undoubtedly no lack of willingness on the part of many employers to supplant their men with lower-paid female labour. Various Trade Unions have tried to exclude women altogether from their crafts, and the French compositors in 1914 jealously resisted the demands for the admittance of females to their Unions.<sup>1</sup> But, broadly speaking, the question is now settled among Trade Unionists in this country.<sup>2</sup> In all the important industries, where a large number of women work side by side with the men—as in cotton, hosiery, boot and shoe manufacture, tailoring, cigar-making, pottery—the Unions

<sup>1</sup> The English printers waged a similar struggle against the employment of women in the middle of last century; but in 1886 the Typographical Association and the London Society of Compositors agreed to admit women "upon the same conditions as journeymen, provided always the females are paid strictly in accordance with scale." This, however, makes it practically impossible for women to become members, since employers would not consider them worth the high rates paid to male compositors. Only one woman joined the L.S.C.—and her case was exceptional (she was employed at Morris's Kelmscott Press). See *Women in the Printing Trades*, by J. R. MacDonald (1904).

<sup>2</sup> But see below, Chaps. IX. and X., for position since the war.

admit the two sexes to membership, maintaining their standard by insisting on the principle of 'equal pay for equal work.' But for the most part the work is not actually equal, since the sexes tend to be employed at separate processes or perform different operations,<sup>1</sup> and there is consequently no question of encroachment on the higher standard. In the cases where identical work is being done, there is a single rate which does not discriminate between the woman and the man.<sup>2</sup>

There is one other form of the Trade Union claim to a vested interest for its members, which must be mentioned. The regulations we have been discussing so far represent the resistance to encroachment on the craftsman's security from below. But encroachment is obviously possible from the side also, and in certain industries where different trades tend naturally to overlap, we find the Unions constantly

<sup>1</sup> *E.g.* in the hatmaking trade in the Denton district (wool and fur hats), the wool-forming, trimming and machine-binding is done by women, and the other processes by men. And for many other instances, see *Women's Work and Wages*, by E. Cadbury, M. C. Matheson, and G. Shann (Unwin, 1906).

<sup>2</sup> *E.g.* the Lancashire cotton weavers all conform to the same price list; the general difference in the weekly earnings of the women is simply due to the fact that they confine themselves to the lighter work. In the Huddersfield woollen and worsted trade, however, the women weavers are paid on an actually lower scale (agreed to by the Union) than the men. It is said that the amount of assistance and supervision by foremen, which is required by women weavers, is about 20 per cent. greater than that required by male weavers.

occupied in protecting their members' jobs against workers in these allied trades. In the shipbuilding and engineering industries especially the demarcation disputes constitute a really serious problem. Boilermakers, Engineers, Plumbers, Shipwrights, Joiners, Patternmakers and various other societies have frequently been engaged in internecine conflicts about the right of their respective members to some particular class of work. Occasionally the bitterest quarrels have arisen over what seem ludicrous details, as, for example, in the historic dispute in the Tyne and Wear shipyards as to whether the fixing of 2½-inch pipes should be done by plumbers or by fitters, or in the more recent altercation between the angle-iron smiths, of the Boilermakers' Society, and the blacksmiths, of the Amalgamated Engineers, as to who ought to make bulwark stays! We shall have to recur to this demarcation question later; here we need only say that the Trade Unionists themselves are alive to the folly of it, and that the best minds in the movement recognise that such a claim to a vested interest is no part of a sound Trade Unionism.

## CHAPTER VI

### TRADE UNION METHODS

Voluntary Insurance—Political Action—Collective Bargaining—Conciliation and Arbitration—The Strike

TRADE UNIONISM has four principal methods of protecting its standards. The first is, so to speak, internal, the Union not being concerned directly with the employer or with the community, but constituting itself an insurance society for its own members. The second aims at the enforcement of the 'common rule' through legislation, either covering the whole industry of the nation or applying to particular trades or groups of trades. The third and fourth are forms of 'industrial action' or 'direct action.' Here the Trade Unions rely on their own power to enforce their demands, whether by diplomacy in the form of negotiation with the employers, or by actual stoppage of work till their terms are conceded. These four methods, which we call Voluntary Insurance, Political Action, Collective Bargaining and the Strike, are all in vogue to-day.

Their relative importance varies, and has varied, of

course, according to circumstances. In the eighteenth century, when it was still customary for Parliament to take upon itself the regulation of industry, the primitive Unions and Trade Clubs, as we have already seen, turned naturally to the law for protection.<sup>1</sup> With the advent of the *laissez faire* philosophy, however, they were forced back upon their own resources, and voluntary insurance became important. After the repeal of the Combination Laws, the system of collective bargaining began to be built up, though, wherever chance offered, the workmen eagerly availed themselves of the help of Parliament, as in the case of the Factory laws, whilst the weapon of the strike was never allowed to grow rusty. Later still, in the middle of the nineteenth century, as the Trade Unions' power outgrew their popularity, and the employers were as little favourable to collective bargaining as Parliament was to legal enactment, voluntary insurance was, in the words of one of the leaders of those days, "the usual and regular way in which the labour of the members of a trade society is protected."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A very early instance of collective bargaining is found among the printers. So far back as 1785 a "London Scale of Prices for Compositors' Work" was in operation, and this scale has actually formed the basis on which compositors have worked down to the present—with alterations, of course, made by the mutual consent of representative employers and workmen, from time to time.

<sup>2</sup> See T. J. Dunning, *Trades Unions and Strikes: Their Philosophy and Intention* (London, 1860), p. 10.

Then, in the 'seventies the Unions received their charter from Parliament, their representatives went to Westminster, and 'political action'—of a rather timid kind, no doubt—was steadily pursued.

At the close of the last century and the beginning of this, the belief in the efficacy of legislation, sedulously fostered by the Socialists and presently enhanced by the advent of the Labour Party, was growing apace, though a remarkable elaboration of the machinery of collective agreements and conciliation was proceeding simultaneously. And it is probable that the reaction against political methods, which we have witnessed of late, is largely the result of the over-emphasis which the Trade Union movement has put upon its achievements and its possibilities in the House of Commons.

Voluntary insurance, as a method of Trade Unionism, means the provision of funds by common subscription to insure against certain risks either due to causes over which the members have no control, or deliberately incurred in the struggle to protect their standard of life. This covers not only the friendly benefits, such as funeral, sick and accident, and superannuation pay, and the 'trade' benefits, such as unemployment pay, but also the very important 'dispute benefit' paid to the members on strike or locked out.



Of the friendly benefits, funeral benefit appears to be the oldest, as well as the commonest. It is given by practically all the chief societies, with the exception of certain Miners' Unions, on the member's death and often on the death of his wife—sometimes even for the burial of his widow or children. The amounts paid in different Unions vary considerably. The Engineers, Boilermakers and Carpenters and Joiners give £12, the Bricklayers £15, the London Society of Compositors from £9 to £20, according to length of membership, the Scottish Ironmoulders as much as £30; whilst the Yorkshire Miners pay £6, and some of the Cotton Spinners' branches only £2. The amount paid on the wife's death is generally £5 or £6, which is in some Unions deducted from the member's own benefit, if his wife predeceases him.

Sick and accident benefits are a more recent introduction, though traces of the former are found here and there among the eighteenth-century Unions. The latter is, naturally, not of very serious importance, except in the more hazardous trades, and the amounts paid out in respect of accidents have considerably decreased owing to the Workmen's Compensation Act. The last published figures (for 1908) show that, out of 1058 Unions (representing 99 per cent. of all Unions) giving benefits, 52 per cent. included sick and accident pay in ~~these~~.

Among those which give no sickness or accident benefit are the vast majority of the miners', textile and printing trades' and transport Unions. The amount of the sickness benefit is sometimes as high as 15s. a week, but the average, speaking roughly, is about 10s. a week. In the majority of cases it may be drawn for fifty-two consecutive weeks (occasionally at a reduced figure for so long as the sickness lasts), though thirteen or twenty-six weeks is a common limit.

Superannuation benefit is less general. It is confined, naturally, to the wealthier Unions, such as those in the metal, engineering and shipbuilding, building and printing trades. Few of the Miners, and none of the Weavers or Labourers, give it at all, though for the miners it is provided by 'Miners' Permanent Relief Societies.' The amount of this pension varies in different societies, as does the age of eligibility. The Engineers, for instance, pay from 7s. to 10s. per week, according to length of membership, at fifty-five years of age, the London Society of Compositors from 5s. to 10s. at sixty.

Unemployment benefit, or 'donation,' was in former times generally given as 'tramp benefit,' or travelling relief, to members in search of work, and in some of the building trades' Unions it still largely survives in this form. But for the most part it has been elaborated into one of the two

most important of all the benefits, and it actually accounts for something like 25 per cent. of the total annual expenditure of the 100 principal Unions. The amount of this out-of-work pay sometimes runs up to 15s. or more per week, but the average, as in the case of the sick benefit, tends to be about 10s.\* Another form of unemployment benefit is found in the payments made, especially in the cotton industry, on account of stoppages of work due to fires, failures of firms, breakdowns of machinery or excessive slackness of trade. A few Unions also give emigration allowances. The London Society of Compositors, for instance, grants from £3 to £15 to a member going abroad, according to the length of time he has been in the Union.

Dispute benefit is provided by nearly all Unions, and in many of them holds the first place. The London Compositors, for example, are entitled to 25s. a week (for a period of twenty-six weeks) when on strike, and even labourers' societies, such as the Gasworkers, give 12s. 6d. Sometimes the amount is supplemented by extra allowances for children, as with the Spinners, who grant £1 a week, plus 2s. for each child under thirteen who is not earning.

Lastly, there are certain minor benefits given occasionally in the shape of benevolent or distress grants, compensation for loss of tools by fire or water, legal assistance, orphan funds, or 'victimisation' pay

allowed to members "prosecuted by employers for taking an active part in business connected with and authorised by the Society."

The diagrams on pp. 126, 127 show the proportion of expenditure on different benefits in certain industries, and the variations of expenditure in these benefits by the 100 principal Unions in the Kingdom.

If now we have to answer the question—what is the exact value of the system of voluntary insurance, we must begin by making certain distinctions. First, we must distinguish more or less sharply between the friendly benefits, the out-of-work benefit, and the dispute benefit. And secondly, we must distinguish between the advantage to the individual workman and to the Union as a whole. Obviously the workman's interest is to provide as far as possible against casualties and losses in the shape of sickness, accident, death or unemployment. As regards the first three, at any rate, of these particular risks, he might meet them by paying into a Friendly Society or a commercial Assurance Company.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, he might well get greater security and better terms by so doing, and, in point of fact, many Trade Unionists do belong to such organisations as well as to their trade society. For

<sup>1</sup> Some of the commercial Assurance Companies, having become Approved Societies under the National Insurance Act, insure now against sickness—which previously they had not done.

the most part, however, a man finds it convenient not to have to join a number of different clubs, and,

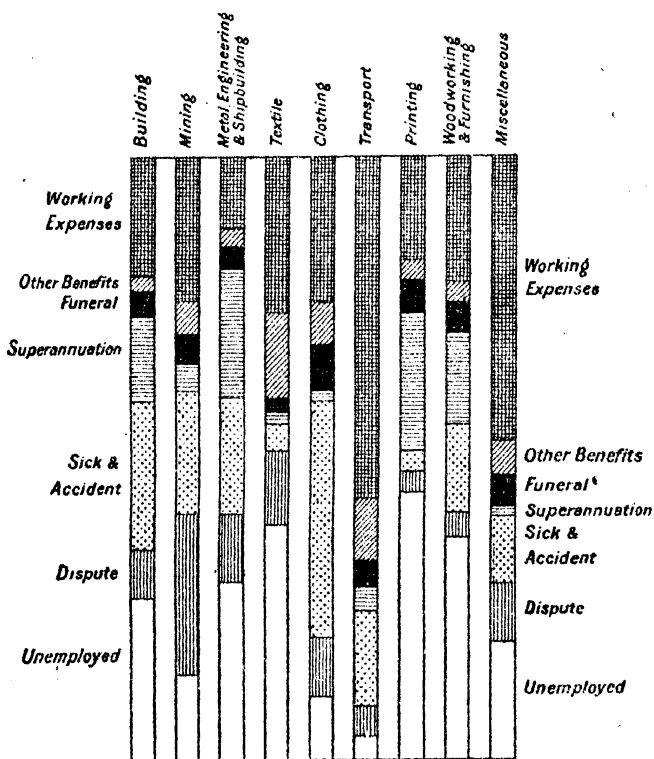
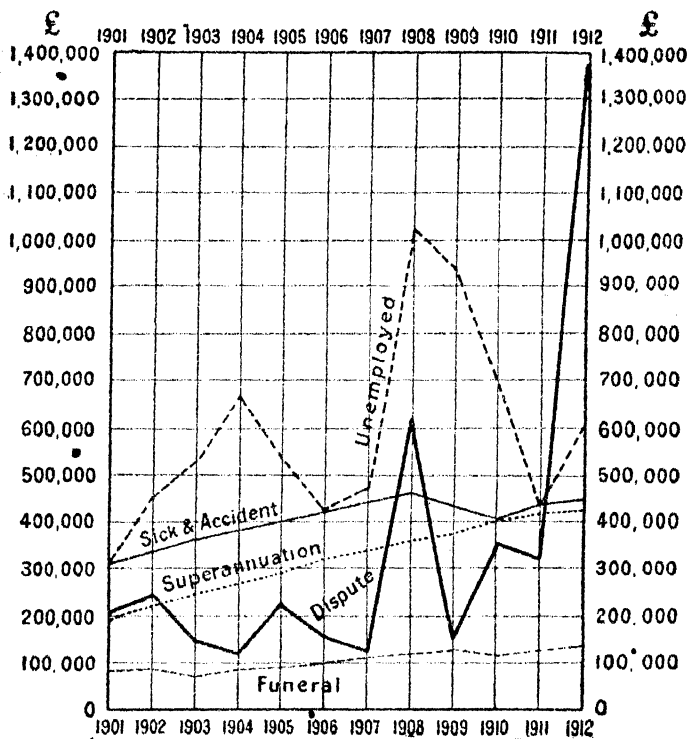


Diagram showing proportion of total expenditure of the 100 Principal Trade Unions (grouped by Industries) devoted to Unemployed, Dispute, Sick and Accident, Superannuation, Funeral and Other Benefits, and to working expenses in the decade 1901-1910.

if one subscription will cover a variety of risks, he prefers that arrangement. But it is not the *first*

business of a Trade Union to be a Provident Society or a Sick Club, and the main reason for its 'friendly' activities is to be sought not in their intrinsic con-



Variations of total expenditure in Benefits in years 1901-12 of the 100 Principal Trade Unions.

venience to the individuals in distress, but in their value as a method of attracting and holding members. The friendly benefits help, in short, as Mr. Howell has said, "to bind the members to the

Union where possibly other considerations might interpose to diminish the zeal of the Trade Unionist pure and simple.”<sup>1</sup>

But out-of-work benefit stood from the beginning in a different category. For this the workman was bound to join his Union, since there was no other agency (until the recent entry of the State into the field under the National Insurance Act<sup>2</sup>) to provide against the contingency of unemployment. Accordingly, from the Trade Union's point of view also, as well as the individual's, the unemployment benefit occupies quite a distinct position. Nevertheless, it is not an end in itself. Its prime importance, as is frankly recognised, lies in the fact that it is a means—and an essential means—of protecting the members' standard of life. It is, in a word, a method of supporting the Trade Union regulations, helping, as it does, to prevent the unemployed workman, reduced to distress and perhaps starvation, from breaking back to individual bargaining and offering his labour to the employer on terms below the standard rate. The danger of such a position has been appreciated by the Trade Unions from the earliest days, and it is the overwhelming necessity of guarding against it, which has

<sup>1</sup> *Trade Unionism, New and Old*, by George Howell, p. 102.

<sup>2</sup> The original State benefit of 7s. a week (for certain trades) has since been raised and extended, but it is still clearly inadequate.

sometimes led even to the depletion of the funds available for sickness or superannuation or burial, in order to pay unemployment benefit.

We have observed that it is not the chief business of a Trade Union to dispense provident benefits. But there are many who go still further than this, and say that it is not the Trade Union's business at all—that, in fact, it is a danger and a weakness for a Union to disguise itself as a Friendly Society. The revolt against the excessive friendly activities of the older Unions began, as has already been mentioned, with the 'new Unionism' of the eighteen-eighties, and there is a growing aversion to-day among the more militant section from what is called "the glorified goose and coffin club" idea. The revolutionary Trade Unionists of France, intent on their policy of 'direct action,' and under the constant necessity of replenishing their inadequate strike funds, are bitterly contemptuous of all friendly benefits, though they have begun to realise the importance of out-of-work pay, and are making strenuous efforts to extend their *caisses de chômage*. There is certainly some truth in the complaint that a system of large friendly benefits tends to make a Union conservative and over-cautious. The history of the great societies in the nineteenth century showed this only too clearly, and history has not failed to repeat itself. At the same time, to abandon this



class of benefits altogether would undoubtedly be to abandon a very effective means of recruiting members, many of whom, when once brought in, are likely to turn out as bold as the most militant could desire. And, indeed, it is perhaps rather futile to discuss such a step; the Insurance Act has enormously strengthened the system and has involved the Unions so deeply in it, that it would be very difficult for a General Secretary to say, as one said five-and-twenty years ago, that he did not believe in having sick pay and out-of-work pay.<sup>1</sup> In any case, one need not unduly exaggerate the extent to which friendly benefits act as a drag. If, and in so far as, they obscure the true functions of Trade Unionism, they ought, of course, to be opposed; but the new spirit, which to-day is animating even the most unprogressive of the Unions of yesterday, is some evidence that the possession of friendly benefits does not necessarily imply corporate selfishness and a policy of supreme tameness.

Twenty years ago, it is interesting to observe, there were many who confidently predicted that the friendly benefits would rapidly dwindle as State provision extended. But the State has moved very slowly, and the prediction has not yet been fulfilled. The Old Age Pensions Act of 1908 touches only the most necessitous—and these not till they are seventy

<sup>1</sup> Cf. p. 31 above.

—and its *maximum* allowance is the niggardly sum of 5s. a week. The Trade Unions, however, have to provide for their members ten or fifteen years earlier, and the effect of the Act on the superannuation funds is quite negligible. The Boiler-makers, it is true, do not permit a member who is in receipt of an Old Age Pension to draw more than 8s. a week in superannuation benefit. But this is exceptional, and the average expenditure of all Unions on this head actually rose from 4s. 11¼d. per member in 1908 to 5s. 6¼d. in 1910. Nor has the Insurance Act had any different result in this respect, the Trade Unions having in general simply added the State sickness and out-of-work benefits to their own.<sup>1</sup> As regards funeral benefit, though there is a strong case for performing all burials at the public expense, nothing at all has been done. In course of time, however, one may expect an enlargement of communal provision, which will effectually lessen the need for voluntary insurance on the part of the Trade Unions. Meanwhile, it is futile to attempt a frontal attack on the friendly benefit system in the old and wealthy societies of

<sup>1</sup> The amounts paid out by the State under Part II. of the Insurance Act, however, are pretty considerable. In the first four months of 1914 they came to £133,395, while the total for 1913 was £497,725. And the subsidy (under sect. 106, amended now by sect. 14 of the National Insurance (Part II, Amendment) Act, 1914) to Unions with voluntary unemployment funds affords some relief.

this country, and what is generally advocated is the separation of the fighting and trade funds, on the one hand, and the friendly funds on the other, contributions to the former being universal and compulsory, and to the latter optional.

It is clear that voluntary insurance, whatever its importance in the past, cannot be regarded at the present time as anything more than a supplementary method of protecting the Trade Union standards. But with political action, collective bargaining and the strike, the case is very different. The popularity of legislative intervention in the concerns of Labour has, as we have seen, had its ebbs and flows. We have already described how the eighteenth-century combinations went to Parliament with their grievances and demands, and how, at the close of the long period of *laissez faire* a hundred years later, the Trade Union movement returned with renewed zest to political action.

We have referred to the political machinery which was created, both for particular trades, such as the textile and mining, and for organised Labour as a whole—the local Trades Councils, the Trade Union Congress with its Parliamentary Committee, and finally the Labour Party itself. It would be too long to enumerate here all the laws, regulating wages and hours and conditions of employment, which have, at one period or another, been placed

on the Statute Book mainly as a result of these activities. But the most cursory glance at the history of the last seven or eight years will show the importance which the working class has attached to parliamentary action. Leaving aside such far-reaching measures as the Insurance Act and the Labour Exchanges Act, we have witnessed, at the direct instigation of organised Labour, two large alterations of the status of the Trade Unions (in the Trade Disputes Act, 1906, and the Trade Union Act, 1913); the extension of the Workmen's Compensation and the Factory codes; the regulation of dangerous trades, such as the making of matches, of earthenware and china, of white and yellow and red lead, the casting of various metals, the bottling of aerated waters, and numerous other occupations; the legal limitation of the hours of vast bodies of workers, miners, shop assistants, policemen and others; the passing of the Coal Mines (Minimum Wage) Act; as well as various proposals introduced by the Labour Party in the House of Commons to establish a minimum wage in every trade throughout the Kingdom. The regulation by law of the sweated industries has become popular; Trade Boards have already been instituted in eight of the worst paid occupations, and will probably be extended before long to agriculture and else-

where.<sup>1</sup> In Victoria, where this policy had its origin, practically all industries, and not merely the 'sweated,' are now equipped with Wages Boards, fixing hours of work as well as minimum rates.<sup>2</sup> There are many who favour a similar development in this country, and the Labour Party has, in fact, introduced a Bill in Parliament<sup>3</sup> requiring the Board of Trade to set up a Trade Board, which shall endeavour to establish a minimum rate of 25s. and a maximum week of forty-eight hours, in every trade where (a) the rate usually paid to adult workers of either sex does not exceed 25s. a week, or (b) application is made by either the men's or the employers' organisation and, in the opinion of the Board of Trade, a majority desires a Trade Board. Theoretically, therefore, at any rate, the possibilities of enforcing the Trade Union demands through Parliament are very large, and the belief in this method is now firmly rooted, despite certain disadvantages which it possesses and a certain amount of disillusionment with it during the last

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 72 n.

<sup>2</sup> Nine States in America passed minimum wage laws for women and juveniles in 1913. In Utah the minimum wage is prescribed by statute; in the others by Wage Boards. In several cases the Board may determine conditions of labour and hours as well as wages. Massachusetts and Nebraska make publicity (by proclamation in the newspapers), and not a legal fine, the penalty for failing to pay the rates fixed. See *Labour Gazette*, May 1914, p. 165.

<sup>3</sup> Labour (Minimum Conditions) Bill, 1914.

few years. But before we attempt to appraise its value, we must examine the methods of collective bargaining and the strike, in order that we may compare more exactly the relative scope of political action and 'direct' action.

Collective bargaining, the method of settling standard rates, conditions of employment, and so on, by direct treaty between employers and organised bodies of workmen, is by many regarded as the *raison d'être* of the Trade Union. It is certainly the normal means by which the common rule is applied throughout the whole, or large parts, of a trade, instead of each man making his own contract separately with his employer. Its primitive form is the 'shop bargain,' where representatives of all the workpeople, or all of a certain grade, in a particular shop or firm settle prices and the like with the foreman or employer. But with the growth of Trade Unionism, on the one hand, and of combination among employers, on the other, this practice has broadened out into an elaborate system of 'collective agreements,' culminating in many trades in Standing Joint Committees or Boards of Conciliation for the mutual arrangement, sometimes down to the minutest details, of matters in dispute.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Board of Trade Reports on Collective Agreements [Cd. 5366], 1910, and on Rules of Voluntary Conciliation and Arbitration Boards and Joint Committees [Cd. 5346], 1910.

These collective agreements, in one shape or another, are found now in almost every industry. According to the official Reports of the Board of Trade, there were no less than 1696 in force in the United Kingdom in 1910, covering directly nearly two and a half million persons, besides many more indirectly. One may say, in fact, that probably one-half of all the manual workers (apart from the twelve per cent. employed in agriculture or domestic service) are regulated more or less by collective agreements. There are three main types of agreement, the first and commonest settling wages and hours; the second dealing with conditions of work, ventilation, sanitation, conveniences or amenities; and the third marking a definite interference of the Trade Union in the 'management,' through stipulations on such questions as the employment of non-Unionists, or apprenticeship, or the number and class of men to be employed on a particular job. Very often, of course, the same agreement will cover the whole ground, as in the case of the famous 'Shipyard Agreement' between the Shipbuilding Employers' Federation and eleven Unions. But occasionally the third point is expressly excluded, as, for example, in the London County Council Tramways Conciliation Scheme, which defines questions that may be dealt with as differences (1) as to rates of wages, (2) as to hours of labour,

(3) relating to general conditions of labour not being questions of discipline or management.

In the system of conciliation the principle of collective bargaining is carried a stage further, by the establishment of permanent machinery for the discussion and settlement of matters in dispute. This machinery consists in Boards of Conciliation—courts or committees manned by equal numbers of employers and employed—occasionally set up by official mandate, as in the case of the Railway Boards constituted under the authority of the Board of Trade, but in general by voluntary pact of masters and men. There are now more than 300 of these permanent Boards,<sup>1</sup> the bulk of them dealing with particular trades, but a few being ‘District Boards,’ offering their services as mediators at large, so to speak, in industrial differences, and two whose function is restricted to questions affecting employees of Co-operative Societies. In addition the Conciliation Act of 1896 gives the Board of Trade power, of which a fair amount of use has been made, to hold inquiries into any industrial dispute, to bring the parties together in conference, and to lend the services of an official conciliator.<sup>2</sup>

The principal industries equipped with this

<sup>1</sup> Three hundred and twenty-five at the end of 1913.

<sup>2</sup> But this is superseded by the Industrial Courts Act, 1919 (see Chap. IX.). See also Chap. XI. for Whitley Councils.



machinery are coal mining,<sup>1</sup> iron and steel ship-building, engineering, textile, clothing and boot and shoe manufacture, printing and furnishing. The highly developed scheme in the boot and shoe trade provides that any matter in dispute must first be discussed with the individual employer concerned; then between the employer and the Trade Union representative; then, failing a settlement, the Local Arbitration Court appoints a Committee of Inquiry; and lastly two arbitrators or umpires come in, whose decision is binding. During all these stages no strike or lock-out may be declared, under a heavy penalty. And the same principle, that there must be no stoppage of work till all the stages of conciliation have been gone through, is found in the national agreement covering the engineering trade, and, indeed, in nearly all the cases where the policy has been adopted. This, in fact, is the rationale of the Conciliation Boards: "their real value," as Sir George Askwith has said, "depends on their ability to prevent stoppages of work rather than on their power to settle strikes or lock-outs which may have already taken place."<sup>2</sup> But it is just here that we

<sup>1</sup> The ordinary Conciliation Boards, which have existed in the coal industry for many years, are distinct from the Boards set up in 22 districts by the Coal Mines (Minimum Wage) Act, 1912.

<sup>2</sup> Of 7508 cases settled by Conciliation Boards from 1900 to 1909, only 104, or about 1 per cent., were preceded by a stoppage of work; while in 1912 the Boards settled 2138 cases, of which only 16 involved a stoppage.

come upon the great weakness of conciliation 'pure and simple'—in the fact that it is impotent to guarantee a definite conclusion which shall prevent a stoppage. If the two parties on the Board cannot find a basis of agreement, what is to happen? There are only two alternatives, either a cessation of work, or a reference to the judgment of some other authority whose decision shall be binding. In order to ensure the avoidance of a deadlock, therefore, some system of arbitration must be added, and, in point of fact, about half the Boards and Committees have provided full automatic machinery to meet this difficulty, by carrying the dispute either to (1) an arbitrator appointed by the Board of Trade, or (2) a permanent neutral chairman, arbitrator or umpire, or (3) an arbitrator or umpire appointed *ad hoc*, or (4) three arbitrators, with decision by majority. But even so this is not enough, unless the decision of the arbitrator can be enforced, and the system thus runs logically on to compulsory arbitration. This has been applied in Australasia, in Denmark and elsewhere, but it has not found favour in this country, though it has from time to time been proposed in one form or another. During the last decade of the nineteenth century opinion was growing more and more against strikes, and it might have been predicted with some confidence that compulsory arbitration would have been

established by now in the United Kingdom. But recently there has been a decided revulsion of feeling, and even the Industrial Council, an official body composed of representative employers and Trade Unionists, has after careful investigation reported against it. The nearest thing that we have to it is the self-imposed prohibition of strikes in the boot and shoe trade, with the provisions for forfeiture of monetary guarantees in case of stoppage of work in violation of agreements. This, however, covers only a portion even of the boot and shoe industry (*viz.* the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives, which has less than 50,000 members, and the Employers' Federation, employing about 45,000 out of a total of 126,000 workpeople in the industry). And in any case it is a voluntarily adopted system, in which the State exerts no compulsion.<sup>1</sup>

The method of collective bargaining, then, has evolved into an elaborate scheme of diplomacy which is designed not only to protect the workmen's standard of life, but also to obviate, as far as possible, the resort to industrial war. In 1912 there were 3083 cases dealt with by permanent Boards and Committees, of which 2138 were settled, whilst a considerable percentage of actual disputes were ended by conciliation or arbitration.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Chap. IX. below for developments during and after the war, and especially the Industrial Courts Act, 1919.

<sup>2</sup> 99 disputes were so settled in 1912; 22 under the Conciliation Act; 12 by conciliation, and 1 by arbitration of Permanent Boards

## TRADE UNION METHODS 141

Nevertheless the long annual lists of industrial conflicts show the extent to which the Trade Unions make use of their final weapon of the strike.<sup>1</sup>

The following table gives a general comparison for the years 1904-13:—

Year.	Number of disputes beginning in each year.	Total number of workpeople involved.	Aggregate duration of working days lost.
1904	355	87,208	1,484,220
1905	358	93,503	2,470,189
1906	486	217,773	3,028,816
1907	601	147,498	2,162,151
1908	399	295,507	10,834,189
1909	436	300,189	2,773,986
1910	531	515,165	9,894,831
1911	903	961,980	10,319,591
1912	857	1,463,281 *	40,914,675 *
1913	1462	677,254	11,491,000

\* (These numbers are exceptionally large owing to the Coal Strike of 1912, which involved 850,000 men.)

and Standing Joint Committees; 12 by District Boards, Trades Councils, and the General Federation of Trade Unions; 43 by 'voluntary conciliation machinery' and by individual mediators; and 9 by the formal arbitration of individuals.

<sup>1</sup> See Board of Trade Report on Strikes and Lock-Outs in 1912. [Cd. 7089]. 1913.

The latest year, it will be seen, shows an enormous increase of disputes; the number is, in fact, more than double the average of the preceding twenty years, and the number of workpeople involved is about double the average of the same period. Of course, it should be remembered that the figures, high as they are, of persons involved in any one year represent but a small proportion of the total number engaged in industry. In 1913 this proportion amounted only to a little over 6 per cent., while the average for the last ten years is less than 5 per cent. And similarly one should not be unduly shocked by the total of 'working days lost.' The eleven million lost days of 1913 are equivalent to rather less than one extra holiday in the year, if spread over the whole industrial population. One hears very little complaint of the stoppage of production, and the nine or ten million 'working days lost,' on such an occasion as a Coronation holiday!

The majority of these disputes have been concerned with questions of wages, and a smaller number with hours of work. Other common causes are objections to foremen and other officials, to non-Unionists, or to changes in arrangement or conditions of work, demands for the reinstatement of dismissed employees, demarcation questions, the employment of boys and women in substitution for men, and various forms of 'sympathetic' movements.

We find, then, that the methods of legislative enactment, collective bargaining and the strike are indifferently used by practically all Trade Unions for the achievement of their ends. Is it possible to fix the relative values of these methods? Is one superior to another? Ought any of them to be altogether abandoned? There are, of course, partisans of each. Individualists of the old school still exist, who object strongly to Parliament concerning itself with industrial regulation, and who, at the same time, desire to keep the Unions on peaceful lines. At the other extreme the Syndicalists have as little patience with the tamer methods of collective bargaining as with the ways of statesmen, and regard the strike as the only weapon worth the workmen's handling. Yet another school, represented, for example, by Mr. Philip Snowden, is emphatic against the strike, and eager for more resolute political action. It will be best for us, in attempting to come to a conclusion amid the multitude of counsellors, to consider the whole matter in the form of two separate questions, examining, first, the advantages and disadvantages of collective bargaining, particularly in its developments of conciliation and arbitration, and secondly, the advantages and disadvantages of the strike—alone or as a complement of collective bargaining—in comparison with legislative enactment.

Now, collective bargaining in principle has manifest

advantages. That may be admitted without begging any questions as to the ultimate aims of Trade Unionism. It is obviously desirable that the two parties in an industrial conflict should discuss and, if possible, settle their immediate differences calmly and dispassionately, just as it is desirable in the case of two nations in dispute. It may be that such a discussion will even show that at the moment the workmen may stand to lose rather than to gain by a strike, and that better terms can be obtained by a peaceful agreement. But the recognition of the value of the principle must not put the Trade Unionists off their guard. It is important that they should not allow themselves to become so entangled in collective agreements as to hamper freedom of action, or indefinitely delayed by the machinery of Conciliation Boards and Standing Joint Committees. Conciliatory negotiations ought to be an armed truce. But, from the outsider's point of view, it is precisely there that the weakness of conciliation lies. It is to the interest of the outside public—or its alleged interest—that there should be the most effective possible machinery for the prevention of strikes. The demand is consequently made for arbitration which shall have a greater degree of finality, and, which, be it noted, is actually an abandonment of collective bargaining. But then a new objection arises on the workman's part. He does not so much demur to the impartial

skilled conciliator, such as he is familiar with under the Conciliation Act, though he knows that it is not easy to get a really unbiased judgment in an industrial dispute to-day. But when he is asked to accept the fiat of an outside person, his objection really becomes serious, and it is the strength of this objection which makes the most elaborate 'voluntary arbitration' machinery so defective, and leads naturally to the demand, on the part of some enthusiasts for industrial peace, for coercive authority to be attached to the decision. Compulsory arbitration, however, we have seen, involves a restriction of liberty which the 'Trade Unions in this country refuse to accept—and quite properly so, as we shall show presently, when we come to examine the 'right to strike.' And, incidentally, we may remark that compulsory arbitration, though theoretically it may be a panacea for stoppages of industry, is, to judge from the example of Australasia, by no means so in practice. Despite the strict provisions of the Industrial Arbitration Laws in the Commonwealth, in New South Wales, in Western and Southern Australia and in New Zealand, there have been numerous strikes, and even a few lock-outs, in contravention of awards by the Courts, resulting in prosecutions, fines and imprisonments.<sup>1</sup> In New Zealand,

<sup>1</sup> See "Memoranda . . . on Laws in British Dominions and Foreign Countries affecting Strikes and Lock-outs" [Cd. 6081], 1912.



too, the dissatisfaction both with the operation of the law and with its basic principles has now become acute. Various Trade Unions have attempted to regain their liberty by cancelling their registration under the Acts, though this liberty has not always been of much avail to them, since any handful of employees, by forming a new Union and registering it, can thereby bring the whole industry back within the provisions of the Arbitration Laws. This has actually been done by the miners, the watersiders and others, and the 'country without strikes,' as it was proudly called a decade ago, has in the last year or two become an industrial battlefield.

There is, however, another method in vogue in certain of the British Dominions, which stands midway between the inconclusiveness of our own Conciliation Act and the more drastic Compulsory Arbitration Laws of Australasia. The Industrial Disputes Investigation Act, 1907, of Canada provides that, in the event of a dispute in the mining industry or in the public utility services (lighting, water, sanitary, and so on), application may be made by either employers or employees for the appointment of a "Board of Conciliation and Investigation,"<sup>1</sup> and

And cf. Denmark, which has the most 'drastic arbitration machinery in Europe. See Reports of Danish Labour Arbitration Court, 1910, 1911, 1912 (Copenhagen).

<sup>1</sup> In the case of the railways, a Board may be appointed on the application of outsiders, or even on the Minister's own initiative.

until this Board has concluded its inquiry and issued its report, a strike or lock-out is illegal. The Industrial Disputes Prevention Act of the Transvaal, passed two years later, is based on the same principle, but goes rather further, in that, first, it covers not only the mining industry and public utility services, but many other trades, including practically all sections of building and engineering; and secondly, it extends the period during which a strike or lock-out is illegal for a month after the issue of the Board's report. Whether such a method could be applied in this country is more than doubtful; the machinery required would be stupendous, and the difficulty of enforcing the penalties almost insuperable. Theoretically, though there may be a strong argument for imposing some measure of delay on the workers in the public utility services, before they are allowed to turn the community topsy-turvy, the postponement of the right to strike does very seriously impair that right, and in some circumstances, and in some trades in particular (*e.g.* building), where the whole chance of the workmen's success lies in the immediate withdrawal of their labour, it may easily amount to a virtually complete denial of the right. But, as a matter of fact, the officials of the Board of Trade, who have investigated the Canadian Act, do not recommend it as entirely suitable for this country. They consider the prohibition of the

strike or lock-out unessential as compared with the other important function of the system, which is to secure full knowledge for the public and calm consideration between the disputants. That, however, does not really carry us very much further than our own Conciliation Act.

One other suggested development of collective bargaining must be mentioned. This is the proposal made in various quarters, and warmly favoured by a good many Trade Unionists (though the Trades Union Congress has repudiated it),<sup>1</sup> that voluntary agreements entered into by representative bodies of employers and of workmen in any industry should, on the application of both parties, be extended by the Board of Trade over the whole of that industry in a district. Mr. Ramsay MacDonald introduced a Bill in Parliament, at the time of the London transport dispute in 1912, to provide for such an extension in the Port of London,<sup>2</sup> and since then the Industrial Council has recommended the system for general application—provided, however,

<sup>1</sup> The proposal was brought before Congress both in 1912 and 1913, but was voted down on each occasion by large majorities. It does not appear, however, from the speeches delivered by the delegates of the miners, the textile operatives, the railwaymen and others, who opposed it, that they had really grasped its intention. The prevalent feeling seems to have been that it was an insidious form of compulsory arbitration, or a method of dragging the Unions into the Law Courts.

<sup>2</sup> Industrial Agreements Bill, 1912.

that the agreements prohibit any stoppage of work "until the dispute has been investigated by some agreed tribunal and a pronouncement made upon it." This is, in effect, to bring in the objectionable feature of the Canadian Act which we have just examined, and the proposal is not likely to find very wide acceptance among the Trade Unions in that form. The parties ought not to be unduly tied down by the agreement or to be subjected to penalties. Apart from this, however, the plan offers the simplest and probably the speediest method that could be devised for 'levelling-up'—not only where the organisation is poor or of the middling sort, but in the many backwaters of the best organised industries. As Mr. MacDonald puts it, "these agreements as a rule represent the highest conditions that can be obtained for the time being, and they have the merit of being *agreements* and not awards. They are menaced by the competition of firms which stand outside them, and which try to increase their trade at the expense of their workmen's wages and of the business done by their more honourable competitors. . . . If the State were, on application and after inquiry, to make agreements come to by men and employers in any trade common to that trade, it would give the good employer an advantage; it would regularise competition in a way that would be beneficial to all

parties; it would not hamper the combinations of men or employers, because the foundation of the whole scheme is voluntarism.”<sup>1</sup>

We must now return to the strike. Let us consider, first, the point of view of those who believe in industrial fighting for its own sake. To the Syndicalist the strike is not merely a last resource, but the first of the Trade Union methods. Parliament is a futile bourgeois institution, and for the working class to dabble in legislation is a gross waste of time, if not actually pernicious. If, occasionally, some useful social reform is broached, the Trade Unions will not address themselves to the politicians, but will resort to ‘direct action’ to put pressure on them from without. Every strike, successful or unsuccessful, is good; for, as M. Jouhaux, the Secretary of the *Confédération Générale du Travail* of France, puts it, “from every strike the master-class issues weaker, docked of a little more of its authority, whilst at the same time the boldness of the working-class is increased.” Even the least of strikes is a form of *gymnastique révolutionnaire*, a training, so to speak, for the final struggle of the ‘revolutionary general strike.’ This grand general strike, which is the goal of ‘Syndicalism in France and elsewhere, we need not discuss here; it is at best an ideal and inspiration to the revolutionary

<sup>1</sup> See *The Social Unrest*, by J. R. MacDonald, pp. 163, 110.

Trade Union movement, at worst a mere chimera of the imagination. The general strike, however, in ordinary parlance does not imply such a social cataclysm. It is, in fact, often used quite loosely to cover any large stoppage of industry, and even of one trade. Such strikes are, of course, favoured by Syndicalists, as well as by many who are not Syndicalists, and have been tried with varying degrees of success in every country. The efficacy of the 'generalised' strike, as the French call it in contradistinction to the revolutionary general strike, depends naturally on circumstances, and in particular on the organisation and solidarity of the Unions. We shall refer to this again later; from our present point of view the difference between the generalised strike and the local or partial strike is only the difference between greater and smaller.

In this philosophy, then, 'political action' is effectually ruled out, and the conciliatory method of collective bargaining has but a poor chance, though M. Jouhaux admits that "when the worker sees that he can gain advantage by this method, he should use it, provided that he remembers conciliation is only an incident and not a means of action." But the Trade Unions in this country, despite the influence of Syndicalist doctrines in the last few years, do not take this view of the strike. A strike is, for the most part, regarded as something to be

avoided, if possible—as a last and serious resource, just as war is a last and serious resource for a nation, though, as we shall see in a moment, it is necessary to be on our guard against overstraining the analogy between real war and industrial conflict, and exaggerating, as so many middle-class persons do, the horror of a strike. The question still remains, however, whether the workers are right in holding to their belief in the strike. We may look at it from two points of view—first, what we may call the moral, asking ourselves whether strikes are just, and secondly, the economic, asking ourselves whether strikes pay.

The objection raised to the strike in general is that it involves an improper interference with the rights of the community, that the quarrel of two bodies of masters and men ought not to be allowed to inflict the inconvenience and suffering and privation, which are the normal result of stoppage of industry, upon an innocent third party. The answer to this is that the community is generally not an innocent third party. The public has, unfortunately, a very blunted moral sense; it troubles itself but little with the rights and wrongs of the workman's case. So long as he keeps quiet, it is callous; it is seldom roused from its apathy save by the disturbance of the comfort of the 'comfortable classes.'

It sounds very well to call the strike "a method of

barbarism." No doubt it is. But our society itself is a barbarism, so far as the relations of Capital and Labour, of rich and poor, are concerned. And we shall not get rid of the barbarism by hiding it away under the outward trappings of civilisation, any more than we shall make a savage tribe of Central Africa into a European nation by clothing it in frock-coats and patent-leather boots. Before the community can claim rights as against strikers it must develop a higher sense of social justice and a much greater knowledge of industrial conditions. If Society had insisted on the provision of better wages and shorter hours, of healthy working conditions, of greater security of employment for the whole working class, and had seen to it that machinery was established for the speedy settlement of grievances and for immediate attention to the demands of the Trade Unionists, there would be less indecency in the homilies to which strikers are treated. And it might then be found, too, that there would be little necessity for penalising strikes, though, even so, the right to withdraw their labour cannot be taken away from any individuals or body of individuals without violating the principles of social freedom.

But a distinction is sometimes made between strikes in general and that particular class of strike which is directly aimed at the services of the municipality or the State. From the ethical point of



view, however, the case is not very different. The fact that we are harder hit by the stoppage of the railways or the gasworks than by the holding up, say, of a building job, does not make it juster to coerce railwaymen or gas-stokers than bricklayers. No doubt the community will be moved to interfere more quickly and drastically in the one case than in the other, but there is no more right about it. In fact, there is generally less, because in practically all the 'public utility services' the community is the actual employer,<sup>1</sup> and its duty to its employees is all the more direct. A strike such as that at Leeds recently, where the lighting and the sanitation of the city were paralysed, is a lamentable occurrence; but is it not also lamentable that a wealthy municipality should be content to pay its servants a wage of 25s. a week? It is just in the public services, in short, which include a large army of scandalously-paid workmen, that Society has the greatest need—as well as the easiest opportunity—of introducing model conditions. Not until it has done that, ought it to think of protecting itself against its employees.

But do strikes pay? Let us look first at the official classification of the results of the industrial

<sup>1</sup> Even the railways, though not owned in this country by the State, are regulated by the State. And the Board of Trade has had for the past twenty years (by the Regulation of Railways Act, 1893) the right to insist on the Companies improving the wages and hours of their men.

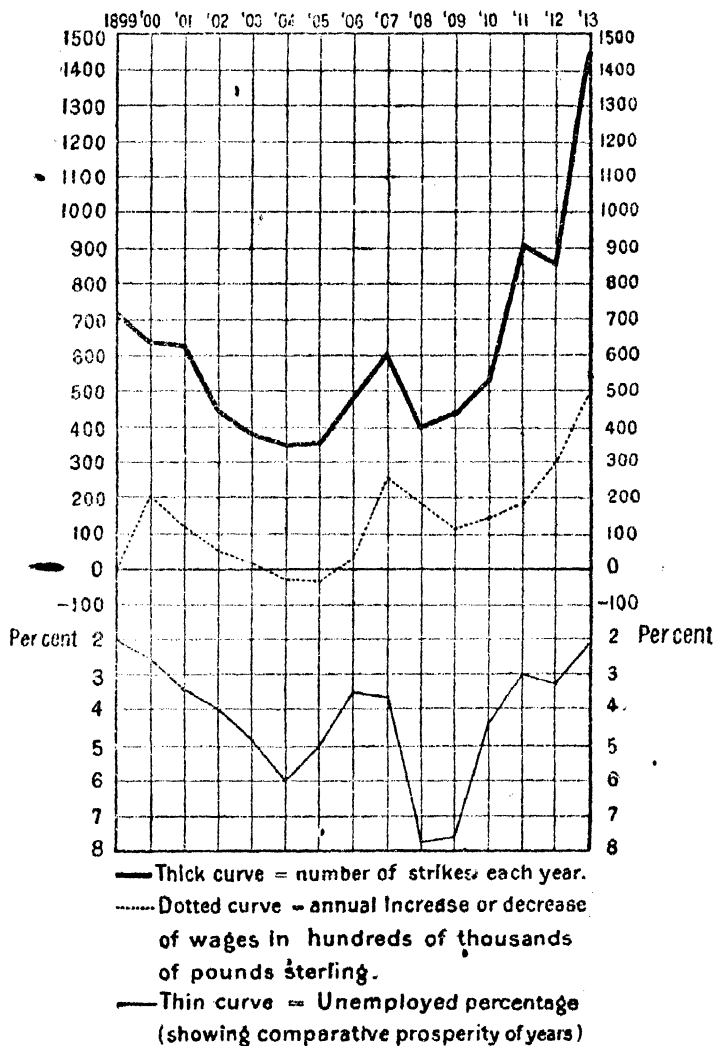
disputes during the last ten years, as given by the Board of Trade.<sup>1</sup> The following table shows the proportion of workpeople directly involved in successful, unsuccessful, and compromised or partially successful disputes :—

Year.	Settled in favour of workpeople.	Settled in favour of employers.	Compromised or partially successful.	Indefinite or Unsettled.
	per cent.	per cent.	per cent.	per cent.
1903	31·2	48·1	20·7	0·0
1904	27·3	41·7	30·9	0·1
1905	24·7	34·0	41·2	0·1
1906	42·5	24·5	33·0	0·0
1907	32·7	27·3	40·0	0·0
1908	8·7	25·7	65·6	0·0
1909	11·2	22·3	66·5	0·0
1910	16·3	13·8	69·7	0·2
1911	6·6	9·3	84·1	0·0
1912	74·5	14·3	11·1	0·1

The corresponding figures for 1913 are not yet available, but the Board of Trade reports that, “although the greater number of disputes were settled by compromises, the number of those settled

<sup>1</sup> Report on Strikes and Lock-Outs in 1912. [Cd. 7089]. 1913.

in favour of the workpeople exceeded those settled in favour of the employers, and the proportion of such completely successful disputes to the total was higher than in any of the previous five years." All these figures, of course, require to be taken very cautiously. Analysis would probably show, for instance, that a number of the unsuccessful strikes were those entered upon without proper organisation, whilst among 'compromises' many can be safely reckoned as having resulted fairly satisfactorily to the workmen. On the whole, we are justified in saying that these figures do not bear out the objection that strikes do not pay. Nor, again, does it seem to be a sound contention that advances in wages have not in general been influenced by strikes. The official records of rises and falls in the aggregate weekly wages of the Kingdom show, in point of fact, a remarkable correspondence with the number of strikes from year to year. And, moreover, this correspondence is not obtained by taking the 'successful' strikes only, a fact which points to another important consideration, sometimes forgotten—namely, that even those strikes "settled in favour of the employers" frequently lead to the victorious employer presently conceding a part, if not all, of what the workmen had fought for. The following chart shows the correspondence of strikes and aggregate annual wages during the past fifteen years:—



The sympathy of these curves, though it must not be pressed too far, does at least mark something more than a mere coincidence.<sup>1</sup> And it should be added that the Board of Trade wages-statistics exclude changes affecting seamen, railway servants and agricultural labourers (and, in 1913, police and Government employees). With these included the upward movement of the wage-curve for the last two years of the table would be far more pronounced, since the railwaymen claim to have gained something like £750,000 in increased wages in 1912, as a result of their strike, whilst a general increase of ten shillings per month accrued to seamen in the early part of 1913, and farm labourers in different parts of the country are known to have profited considerably by strikes or the threat or fear of strikes. There are, of course, losses, discomfort and suffering to be set against the gains of industrial warfare. But there is no reason to doubt that, on the whole, and especially with good Trade Union organisation, the gains weigh down the balance. And the losses and discomfort, it must be remembered, do not fall entirely on the wage-earners and their families. It is only too easy, as we have said, for the well-to-do

<sup>1</sup> The increases are won, of course, in the years of prosperous trade, and it is not contended that without strikes wages would have remained stationary in those years. To measure the exact proportion gained by the strikes in any year would require a detailed examination of the circumstances of each one.

classes to exaggerate in this matter, and politicians and philanthropists, in their readiness to lament the 'pinching' of the poor by a strike, overlook the fact that masses of the poor are living in a chronic state of pinch even in 'piping times of peace.'

But if we conclude that the Trade Unionist is right in clinging to the strike, we do not necessarily imply that every strike pays. Disputes are often entered upon far too light-heartedly, and conducted very imprudently. The cautious Trade Union leader is not always the mere coward that some of the wilder critics seem to suppose; he is often cautious because he knows the meaning of the strike that fails, the disaster that it is likely to bring to the Union, the demoralisation that it may breed in the trade, by undermining the desire and the capacity for Trade Unionism. The enthusiasts in France have had some very painful lessons in this matter.

The sympathetic strike, in particular, is a dangerous weapon, which ought to be handled with extreme care. Not that the sympathetic strike is in itself immoral; in point of fact, it is generally the most altruistic in its motive, and its justification on moral grounds is seldom difficult. But it is not so much a question of abstract morality as of tactics in each particular case. The sympathetic stoppage of the tramwaymen in the Leeds dispute in 1913 did

not really help the gasworkers ; it only increased the odds against them. Nor was any wide cessation of work in England and Scotland likely to have been of so much assistance to the locked-out Dublin labourers during the same autumn as the provision of food and money by the British Trade Unions. On the other hand, there are evidently circumstances where a sympathetic strike may be effective and even necessary. Much the same may be said of the general strike—by which, of course, is meant the ‘generalised’ strike alluded to above—whether for an economic or a political object. M. Jaurès, the French Socialist leader, has laid down the three conditions which, in his opinion, are indispensable for the success of such a general strike. First, he says, the working class must be genuinely convinced of the importance of the object for which it is declared ; secondly, a large section of the general public must recognise the legitimacy of that object ; and thirdly, the general strike must not appear as a pretext for violence, but as the exercise of a legal right on a vaster and more systematic scale. These, as a moment’s reflection will show, are hard conditions to satisfy, and if we add to them, as we must, the requirement of a high degree of solidarity in the Labour forces, it will be plain that the general strike is not a thing to be played with. It has been tried occasionally, and occasionally it has been more or less

successful—notably in the case of the Belgian general strikes for franchise reform (where M. Jaurès' conditions were, on the whole, fulfilled). On the other hand, where those conditions have not been fulfilled, there have been disastrous failures, as in Sweden in 1909.<sup>1</sup> This country has never actually seen a general strike; but the idea of it as a method of preventing a war has recently come into favour. One may be allowed to doubt, however, whether the 'strike against war' is really possible under present conditions in any nation in Europe.<sup>2</sup>

But neither, in saying that on the whole the strike pays, do we commit ourselves to the view that it by itself—or combined with collective bargaining—is the only method which pays. Whatever may be the experience elsewhere, the advantages of legislative enactment, so far as the British Trade Union movement is concerned, are so obvious that we need not dilate upon them here. Moreover, it should not

<sup>1</sup> The Swedish general strike in 1909 was really a *defensive* movement, entered upon with little chances or hopes of success, against a national lock-out. See *Les Lock-Out et La Grève Générale en Suède en 1909* (Beckman, Stockholm, 1912), and Cole, *The World of Labour*, pp. 183 ff. For general strikes in 1920 see below, Ch. IX.

<sup>2</sup> I have left this as it was written in 1914. Events within a few months of its writing went far to justify my doubt. But the conditions are, of course, different now, and the general strike, or the threat of it, may well prove to be the most practicable and potent method of preventing war. For further references to this point see Chaps. IX. and X.



be forgotten that Parliament is not merely a law-making assembly. It is also the council chamber of the supreme executive, and it is, therefore, of enormous importance to have a political organisation of Labour, acting there as the eyes and ears as well as the mouthpiece of the Trade Union organisation that is engaged in a struggle outside. Yet again, we need not be blind to the weakness of the political method. An improvement in the standard of life won by Act of Parliament may possess a greater universality and finality than if it had been won by collective bargaining or by a strike. But it is also harder to win. The delay attached to the passage of a measure promoted by the Trade Unions is only too well known to the workmen. Furthermore, what we have said above as to public opinion in general, applies equally to the opinion of the House of Commons. Parliament, as at present constituted, turns none too ready an ear to the demands of Labour, and, indeed, it has not yet emancipated itself entirely from its old traditions of *laissez faire*. It is moved far less by a sense of social justice than by a fear of the disturbance of social peace, and such measures as the miners' minimum wage, or the higher rates won by the railwaymen, have been wrung from a reluctant Government only after serious industrial upheavals, and even then in a mutilated form. The case of the Trade Boards

Act, though it seems to point in the other direction, still reveals the apathy of the politicians. For here Parliament has lagged notoriously behind the feeling of the country: it was inexcusably slow in admitting the principle, and it has been inexcusably slow in extending it.<sup>1</sup>

Our conclusion, then, is that Trade Unionism needs all its weapons. Collective bargaining is an essential method, though, when developed into the machinery of conciliation, it must be used warily. Political action is important, not only for the legislation that may be secured, but for the actual influence on the executive government which the presence of really independent Labour representation in Parliament can ensure. Finally, the Trade

<sup>1</sup> The weakness of reliance on political action has, of course, become more apparent since the war. The House of Commons has shown itself increasingly indifferent or hostile to the demands of Labour. Moreover, it is so manifestly overloaded with business, that a devolution of a large part of its powers is urgently necessary, and various schemes have, indeed, been put forward. A devolution, however, which still leaves the assembly at Westminster supreme over all industrial affairs, great and small, will not be satisfactory. But this is a large question, which is not within the province of this book. The point to be insisted on here is that while Parliament remains constituted as it is and exercises the powers that it does, Labour cannot dispense with political action, even though it may be forced to make more use of industrial action. (See further references to this subject in Chaps. IX. and XI. And for proposals for drastic alterations of the Parliamentary system see *A Constitution for the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain*, by S. and B. Webb, and the various books on Guild Socialism in the Bibliography below.)

Union must maintain the right to strike, both because the strike is a potent weapon of industrial action, and because, without the threat of it in the background, political action will be seriously weakened.

## CHAPTER VII

### TYPES OF CONTINENTAL TRADE UNIONISM<sup>1</sup>

Germany : the Centralised Unions—France : Syndicalism in Action—Belgium : Trade Unions and the Co-operative Movement.

ONE of the notable features of the twentieth century is the growing interest in Foreign Trade Union movements. Real 'internationalism' is yet weak ; but British Trade Unionists, abandoning their insularity, have at least started to pay attention to the details of organisation and method in other countries, recognising that the problems of Labour are very similar at home and abroad, and that much may be learned from their neighbours' attempts to solve them. We propose, then, in this chapter to touch very briefly on certain typical features of three of the chief continental movements. In Germany we

<sup>1</sup> There have been some changes since the war, but I have not recorded them all in detail in this chapter. The main principles of organisation remain substantially as they were in 1914. The policy of the C.G.T. in France, however, is no longer exactly as described here ; in place of the old narrow Syndicalism a new programme has been adopted (see Chap. XI. for this, and also for other developments in Germany, etc.).

shall find what some regard as a 'new model' of Trade Unionism, which has exerted a powerful influence far beyond Germany itself. In France we shall see that greatly misunderstood thing—revolutionary Syndicalism in action. And Belgium will show us a close-knit Labour Party, in which, as it has been said, Socialism provides the brain that directs, Trade Unionism the weapons for the fight, and the Co-operative Societies the sinews of war.

The German Trade Union movement was at the beginning of this century the most efficiently organised in the world. In 1890, after the withdrawal of Bismarck's anti-socialist laws, a number of Unions, with about 300,000 members, which had continued to exist in the disguise of friendly societies, came out of hiding, established the "General Commission of German Trade Unions," and set to work on a plan of organisation. Two lines of opinion appeared. The 'localists' (*Anarcho-Sozialisten*) wanted federation and autonomy on the French system. The majority, however, favoured national centralisation, and the 'Centralised Unions' (*Zentralverbände*)—or 'Free Unions,' as they are commonly called—were formed. On this a section of the 'localist' minority broke away and founded a separate organisation on Syndicalist lines, which by 1914 comprised only a few thousand members. Besides these there are two other independent, move-

ments, the Liberal, or Hirsch-Duncker, and the Christian Unions. Both are anti-socialist; both assume a real community of interest between workmen and employers, and are partisans of industrial peace. Neither is very strong in numbers. The Hirsch-Duncker Unions have rather more than 100,000 members, and appear to be practically stationary. The Christians have about 350,000, recruited mainly in the mining, textile, railway, metal and building industries. They are more influential as well as more numerous; but they are beginning to be seriously torn by internal strife owing to the mixture of Protestants and Catholics.<sup>1</sup>

The growth of the Socialist or 'Free' Unions has been astonishing. In 1891 they had 277,000 members, in 1904 over a million, and in 1913 the total reached 2,553,162. The thoroughness with which the centralising policy has been carried out is shown by the fact that the whole of this vast membership is comprised in as few as forty-six

<sup>1</sup> There are also numerous associations of clerks, officials of various kinds, etc. (e.g. State railwaymen, postal and telegraph employees, and so on), which are unconnected with either the 'Free' or the Hirsch-Duncker or Christian organisations. But these are regarded rather as professional societies, and many of them are certainly not *bonâ fide* Trade Unions.

The 'blackleg' organisations formed by the employers (known as "peaceful Unions" in the *Imperial Labour Gazette*, and "Yellows" by their enemies) had a membership of 162,262 in 1911.

<sup>2</sup> In 1921 over 8 millions.

Unions, which, be it observed, are not merely federations, but real amalgamations, either on 'industrial' or on 'occupational' lines. They range from the large societies of Metalworkers, with more than 540,000 members, and Building Trades Workers, with nearly 350,000, down to such small bodies as the Music Engravers and the Wood Engravers, with less than 500 each. All of them are open to women as well as men, to the 'unskilled' as well as the skilled.

The Metalworkers' Union, which we may take as a typical example, comprises 451 branches, grouped in eleven Districts. The government is in the hands of a supreme executive committee of paid officials, elected triennially by delegates from the Districts. The authority of this national executive is very substantial, including, as it does, the power to forbid a strike in any District (except a 'defensive' strike: there its sanction is not required, though it is, as a matter of course, consulted before hostilities are begun), the right to reject at its discretion even duly elected candidates for the District executives, and the expenditure of something like seventy-five or eighty per cent. of the ordinary contributions of the members, which are paid direct into its hands, with a final voice even in the disbursement of the balance that remains in the local exchequer. The organisation of the District is elaborate. There are two subdivisions—the one geographical into wards, the

other professional, into 'craft' groups or branches — fitters, moulders, coppersmiths, brassworkers, boilermakers, machinists, crane drivers, scientific instrument makers and so on. Both the ward and the group have their committees, as well as a staff of shop-stewards (*Vertrauensleute*), each one responsible for keeping the members in his particular works or shop in touch with the officials and with the Union as a whole. The central control of the District is in the hands of permanent officials (elected by the general meeting), who, with the chairman of the ward and group committees, form the Executive Council. This Council meets weekly, receives reports from each ward and group, and issues its own decisions and proposals to be laid before the shop-stewards and the ward and group meetings. Once a quarter a general meeting is held, which—in the larger districts at least, like Berlin—is not attended by all the members, but by the various officials, the ward and group committee-men, and the shop-stewards of the District. In exceptional cases, on matters of supreme importance, a referendum may be taken; but ordinarily, in Germany as elsewhere, the great Unions have been forced to abandon the devices of primitive democracy for representative machinery.

Here, then, is a vast organisation, combining into one society literally dozens of different trades, from metalworkers to labourers, from farriers to boiler-



makers, which yet works with smoothness, and can claim considerable success in improving the conditions of its members. What is the secret of this smooth working? Undoubtedly it lies mainly in the form of the organisation itself. That form is one which is peculiarly suited to the German, with his inborn respect for authority and discipline: by a Frenchman it would be rejected with contumely. It is also a form which corresponds to the development of German industry. To meet the highly centralised forces of Capitalism, a highly centralised Trade Unionism is required. Local autonomy must be severely restricted. "It is only a central body," one of the German leaders has said, "that can take a general view of the situation, and that can, when all is said and done, judge the chances of success with more certainty than the mass of the members. . . . It is useless to attack the employer with pin-pricks and bluff. If he knows that your organisation is able to sustain a protracted strike, he is far more disposed to make concessions. For this reason, rash, 'hole and corner' strikes are discountenanced, and it may happen that a local branch may be forbidden to 'down tools' because strategy demands that other localities must move first."<sup>1</sup> But there is

<sup>1</sup> "German Trade Unionism," an address delivered in Brussels, 20th December 1911, by Johann Sassenbach, and published in *Les Tendances Syndicales* (pamphlet), Brussels, 1912.

another important consideration. After all, there are limits to the submissiveness of the German Trade Unionist, and if every one of the half-million Metalworkers were regarded as a metalworker and nothing else, the machine would speedily break down. It is, in short, just because the metalworker is also grouped separately, as a fitter or a coppersmith or a patternmaker or what not, because the real interests of the craft are not totally lost in the interests of the industry as a whole, that the frictions and jealousies and confusion, with which we are plagued in this country, are reduced to a minimum in Germany. And in this connection, too, it is worth noting that even the large authority of the central executive may actually prove a valuable safeguard of the rights of the smaller groups.<sup>1</sup>

The federal machinery of the movement consists of local Trades Councils, very similar to those in this country, but much more effective, and the national body, already referred to, the General Commission of Trade Unions.<sup>2</sup> This corresponds to the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress; but it has greater powers, though

<sup>1</sup> *E.g.* in the case of a projected strike, a small section in a District might easily be overwhelmed by the larger ones, were the decision made by ballot of the District; but, in fact, the decision is in the national executive's hands, which may in a given case quite properly take the view of the smaller section.

<sup>2</sup> This was replaced in 1920 by a new central body (Allgemeine Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund), covering 7½ million Trade Unionists.

it exercises no despotic control over the affiliated Unions. It is composed of thirteen members, elected by the triennial Congress of all the Unions. It reports at regular and frequent intervals to a Council consisting of one representative from each Union. It carries on a vigorous propaganda and issues a large amount of Trade Union literature, including a weekly journal, and admirably compiled statistics. It runs a lecture school for Trade Unionists in Berlin. It has a special secretariat for women, and another (*Zentral-Arbeitersekretariat*) charged with the duty, among others, of representing 'insured persons' in their claims or appeals before the Imperial Insurance Board. And recently it has formed a department for the preparation of material relating to 'social legislation' for the use of the Socialist Members of Parliament and journalists.

The attitude of German Trade Unionism to political action is clearly defined. It believes that the political arm is of equal importance with the industrial; though it maintains a complete independence, and the Unions are not affiliated to the Social Democratic Party. The two movements are, however, in the closest touch; there is a regular consultation between the General Commission and the Executive of the Party whenever joint action is contemplated, and a personal bond also is created

by the fact that practically all the Trade Union officials are prominent politicians. And the same harmonious relations prevail, it should be added, with the Co-operative movement, though here, too, there is absolute independence. In their own sphere the Trade Unions are, to use the French term, decidedly 'reformist.' They favour high contributions and the fullest scales both of friendly and trade benefits. They aim at extending collective bargaining, and they are satisfied to co-operate with the employers on the committees of the Labour Exchanges.<sup>1</sup> As regards the strike, their policy, as has already been mentioned, is prudent, though not timid.<sup>2</sup> They have learnt by experience that a strike cannot be successfully conducted on enthusiasm; it is the power of the purse that tells. As to the general strike and the sympathetic strike, the Germans are very sceptical, and they seek, as a rule, to limit rather than to extend the line of battle in an industrial dispute. And as yet they have seen nothing in the tactics of other Trade Union movements to make them doubt the wisdom

<sup>1</sup> But see Chap. XI. below for reference to developments of policy in the direction of 'workers' control.'

<sup>2</sup> In 1911 there were 2914 conflicts, involving 325,250 persons. The amount paid out in dispute benefit during the year by the Free Unions was over £900,000 (equal to about 30 per cent. of the total expenditure for the year).

of their own. They are, in fine, satisfied that their policy, like their form of organisation, is adapted as perfectly as possible to the conditions of the industrial struggle and to the character of their people.

The French Trade Union movement stands in the sharpest contrast to the German. In Germany the Trade Unions were practically the creation of the Social Democratic Party ; in France they have been moulded above all by Anarchist influences. In Germany the organisation is highly centralised ; in France it is based throughout on local autonomy. The Free Unions of Germany present a united front with a uniform policy and method ; the French *Confédération Générale du Travail* is a battleground of the two rival schools of Syndicalism and Collectivism. These differences and many others, which the student may discern for himself, result, as it is hardly necessary to say, partly from psychological and partly from economic causes. It would be as hopeless to try to impose the discipline and the bureaucracy of the Teuton upon the liberty-loving Latin, as it would be to endow the Zulus with Borough Councils and a House of Commons. And, on the other hand, the industry of France is far less concentrated, retains far more of the old localised and small-scale production, than that of Germany.

The *Confédération Générale du Travail* (General Confederation of Labour), which embraces all the effective Trade Unionism of France,<sup>1</sup> is a skilfully contrived federal organisation. It has two distinct bases—the national Federations or Unions, on the one side, and, on the other, a territorial grouping in the shape of *Union Départementales*, or, as we might say, County Federations of Trades Councils.<sup>2</sup> Each of these two sections forms an integral part of the *Confédération*; each is of equal importance; neither is in any way subordinate to the other, and the Confederal Committee itself, which corresponds to the German General Commission, has no coercive authority over either. Every national Federation or Union and every Trades Council is represented in the *Confédération* by one delegate, just as each individual Trade Union counts for one,

<sup>1</sup> The *Confédération*—the C.G.T., as it is generally called—represents about 500,000 or 600,000 individuals. The statistics published by the Government show, it is true, a total membership of all French Trade Unions amounting to twice that number. But many organisations officially returned as Trade Unions are not genuine Trade Unions at all, but friendly societies, employers' Unions, isolated clubs of agriculturists, and so on. For later developments, including the dissolution of the C.G.T. by the Courts, see Chap. XI. below.

<sup>2</sup> To avoid confusion it should be said that the French word for a Trade Union is *syndicat*.<sup>\*</sup> *Union* means a combination of *syndicats*; e.g. the *Union Départementale de la Seine Inférieure* is the combination of the various *syndicats* in the Département or 'county' of the Lower Seine. When the term 'Trades Council' is used in the text, it will be understood to mean *Union Départementale*.

and for no more than one, in its own Federation or Trades Council. The national Federations and Unions, which number about fifty, are of two kinds — ‘industrial,’ as in the building trades’ and metal-workers’ federations, and ‘craft,’ like the hatters or coopers. The separate craft organisations, however, are gradually disappearing, since the Congress of Amiens in 1906 decided that for the future only ‘industrial’ Federations should be affiliated to the C.G.T., though craft Unions which already belonged might remain members. Inside the Federations the individual Unions generally enjoy the largest measure of liberty, the intention being “that the Unions, when they feel the moment has come to fight, shall be able, without asking anyone’s permission, to act freely, seizing any favourable opportunity which may present itself.”<sup>1</sup> The Federation, therefore, is naturally enough weak in financial resources. A building trades’ worker, for instance, usually pays a contribution to his Union of 1 franc or 1 franc 25

<sup>1</sup> *Le Syndicalisme français*, by L. Jouhaux, p. 11. There are some exceptions to this autonomous system. The Printing Trades Federation (*Fédération Nationale du Livre*), the wealthiest Union in France, is modelled on the German plan, with high contributions and friendly benefits, and a centralised constitution that greatly restricts the power of its affiliated units. The National Union of Railwaymen (*Syndicat National des Travailleurs des Chemins de Fer*) also centralises its government and (to a large extent) its funds, and does not allow a railway strike to be precipitated without the authorisation of the whole society.

centimes per month; but the Union pays to the Federation only 35 centimes per month per member, of which 15 centimes is devoted to expenses of propaganda, administration and the weekly trade journal, 15 centimes to a central 'dispute fund,' and 5 centimes to the *Sou du Soldat*.<sup>1</sup> The rôle of the Federations, then, to quote M. Jouhaux again, is "to organise and strengthen the Unions, to undertake campaigns of a general kind, to reinforce the resistance to the employer." They are, in short, organs of co-ordination and not of control.

The *Union Départementale*, which has the same federal character and allows the same autonomy to its constituent societies, occupies a position of the first importance.<sup>2</sup> Comprising as it does all the

<sup>1</sup> This common, though not universal, benefit takes the form of a small quarterly sum (5 francs) paid to Trade Unionists while they are performing their military service. Its object is to keep the conscript bound to his Union, to prevent his absorption in and corruption by military life, to make him feel that the fraternal sympathy of his comrades follows him to the barracks, and that, although he is turned for the moment into a 'repressive instrument of capitalist exploitation,' he still has duties towards those he has left behind him in the workshop.

<sup>2</sup> The *Unions Départementales* are a development of the *Bourses du Travail*, which themselves began, as their name implies, as local Labour Exchanges, under the patronage of the municipalities. Some twenty years ago the *Bourses du Travail* were federated and developed through the exertions of a brilliant young Anarchist, Fernand Pelloutier. Owing to the militant character which they presently assumed, they frequently came into conflict with the municipalities, and many of them lost their subsidies. But the *Bourse du Travail* was, after all, only the building which sheltered the



Unions in different industries within its area, it is an admirable rallying-point in industrial conflicts, and in the case of a widely extended dispute—anything in the nature of a ‘general’ strike, that is to say—it becomes itself the directing body. It is charged with the duties of general trade organisation and propaganda in its district, as well as with particular educational work, such as the provision of a library, reading and writing rooms, and so on. It acts too as a Labour Exchange, and it is often the headquarters of such ‘friendly society’ activities as the French Unions care, or can afford, to maintain—dispensing legal advice, travelling and other benefits, and occasionally running a surgery or hospital. The *Unions Départementales*, therefore, are far more vital organisations than our Trades Councils, not merely in regard to their material functions, but by reason

Trades Council, and the Trades Council itself still maintained its existence as a unit of the C.G.T. The revolutionary leaders of the *Confédération*, indeed, rather welcomed the breaking away from the restrictions of the bourgeois municipality, and were not slow to encourage the Unions to abandon what was regarded as “a piece of administrative machinery for side-tracking the proletariat.” The real weakness, however, lay in the fact that these *Unions locales*, or Trades Councils, were scattered very unsystematically over the country. It was resolved, accordingly, that at the beginning of 1914 there should be a reorganisation, and that for the future each of the 86 Departments should have one, and only one, *Union Départementale*, to which all the local Unions should be affiliated, while the old *Unions locales* (or *Bourses du Travail*), henceforward to be known as *comités intersyndicaux*, or inter-Union committees, should still continue to carry on local propaganda. €

of the principle they represent. They are, in fact, the main 'organs of class solidarity,' just as the national federations are the 'organs of professional solidarity,' and the strength of the C.G.T. lies in the balancing of the interests of craft and of class by the harmonious alliance of its two sections and the consequent double representation of every Union. And in the State of the future this local Council of Trades will, it is predicted, take the place of the municipality itself, and organise the business of production and distribution in its area.

The policy of the C.G.T. is the outcome of a philosophy based on the idea of the Class Struggle pushed boldly to its logical limits. It goes beyond the ordinary Socialist position, and allows no place for the 'intellectuals' in its ranks. The wage-earners organised in their industrial Unions, it declares, are a force sufficient to win their emancipation by their own efforts, without the interference of Parliament or any political body. In theory the C.G.T. is 'non-political'; but, in fact, it tends to be anti-parliamentarian, and not infrequently treats the Socialist Party with contempt. It is hostile to the State, which it regards as a decadent bourgeois institution. It is anti-militarist, because the Army is an instrument of repression controlled by the capitalist class, as well as a corrupting influence on all who are forced to serve in it. It is anti-patriotic,

because all national disputes are but the disputes of rival capitalists, in which the working class gains nothing, or less than nothing; the workers, in fact, have no concern even with 'defensive wars,' for they have no country but their own and their children's bellies.

The methods of the C.G.T., as all the world knows, are summed up in the two words, 'direct action.' Direct action includes, first and foremost, the strike, whether it be a small and localised strike, or a 'partial general' strike, a 'folded arms' strike, or a sympathetic strike. Every strike is an episode in the Social War; every strike is a salutary training for the supreme struggle of the revolutionary general strike, which one day will overthrow capitalism and the wage-system together with the whole fabric of existing society. And every strike, therefore, has an educative value altogether apart from its immediate success or failure. Besides the strike, there are sabotage and the boycott. Sabotage may take various forms, ranging from the old practice of 'canny'—working as leisurely as possible—to the spoiling of goods or the destruction of machinery. One of the classic instances of its use was the white-washing with caustic of the master-hairdressers' shop-fronts in Paris, in order to secure a weekly holiday and earlier closing. The boycott consists simply in 'blacklisting' shops or firms where Trade Union

conditions are not respected. One method of putting it into operation is through the use of the Trade Union 'label,' the refusal of which to an employer is a sign that 'his goods are to be avoided. 'Hunting the fox' also is usually referred to as one of the forms of direct action. This merely means picketing, which, not being legalised in France as it is here, tends to assume a more formidable aspect.

Such, then, very briefly, is the organisation and policy of the C.G.T.—in theory at least; for actually a good many qualifications are necessary. Indeed, the theory itself is not subscribed to by a large section—perhaps a majority—of the Trade Unionists themselves. The C.G.T. really comprises two sharply opposed parties—the 'Revolutionaries' and the 'Reformists.' The Reformists' philosophy is, in the main, that of the Socialist Trade Unions of Germany or Belgium or Scandinavia. They believe in the Class Struggle; they are not against direct action. But they also believe in political action, and many of them (*e.g.* the Textile Operatives and the bulk of the Miners, the Railwaymen, the Transport Workers, the Clerks) are firm supporters of the Socialist Party.<sup>1</sup> As regards direct action, they desire a more prudent strike policy, with better preparation and more

<sup>1</sup> Only, of course, in their individual capacity; the C.G.T. does not allow its name to be used 'in any electoral act whatsoever.'

adequate finances. They are in favour of friendly benefits, which to the straitest sect of the Revolutionaries are anathema, and of the representation of Unions in accordance with their numerical strength, since such a system, they hold, would put them in the ascendant.<sup>1</sup>

The pressure of the Reformist wing, therefore, has united with the logic of facts to exert a considerable influence on the revolutionary policy. The C.G.T. shows no intention of 'going into politics,' it is true; but it is not blind to the possibility of getting an occasional advantage through the legislature. And similarly even conciliation, it admits, may now and then be usefully employed. It is recognised, too, that the Anarchist theories, which have been predominant until lately in the Trade Union movement, have led it astray. The propaganda of anti-militarism, anti-patriotism and anti-parliamentarism has been overdone, and the proper business of Trade Unionism neglected. Wild and hopeless strikes have led too frequently to disheartenment as well as to serious losses of membership. Even the ortho-

<sup>1</sup> The Revolutionaries deny this. It is untrue to say, they maintain, that they are only a minority dominating the C.G.T. through the power given them by the 'one Union, one vote' system: they actually represent a majority of individuals. But in any case they do not believe in a 'democracy' that makes mere brute numbers supreme. It is the 'conscious minority' which is always the vital force, "which sows and propagates new ideas, and which at the psychological moment spurs the inert mass to action."

dox Revolutionaries, therefore, are insisting on the importance of greater caution, of higher contributions,<sup>1</sup> of the strengthening of unemployment funds, and of more permanent officials to devote their whole energies to the necessary work of organisation. Yet all these qualifications, substantial as they are, do not mark any real deflection from the principles of revolutionary Syndicalism. French Trade Unionism is still firmly based on an organisation whose central idea is autonomy, and a policy whose keynote is violence.<sup>2</sup> We cannot attempt here to estimate how far that organisation and that policy are successful in practice. We have simply outlined the main features of 'Syndicalism in action,' in order that the reader may be in a better position to appreciate the criticism we shall offer presently.

We come, finally, to Belgium. There the Trade Union movement, on its structural side, bears a close resemblance to the German; in fact it has, to its incalculable advantage, deliberately adopted the German system of centralisation within the last five

<sup>1</sup> The disinclination of the French workman to pay is notorious and the usual contributions are very low. Fivepence a week is quite a high figure even in 'skilled' Unions.

<sup>2</sup> 'Violence' here, it should be understood, does not necessarily imply destruction and bloodshed. It does imply a relentless prosecution of the Class Struggle, an active hostility to all bourgeois institutions, including the laws. It is, so to speak, the soul of direct action. See Sorcl, *Réflexions sur la Violence*.

years.<sup>1</sup> With the internal organisation of the Belgian Unions, therefore, we need not concern ourselves here. Nor have we space to discuss the bitter rivalry of the Socialist with the Christian Unions, which are far more important in Belgium than in Germany. Not only are they stronger in numbers relatively to the whole body of organised Labour, comprising as they do something like 30 to 40 per cent. of all the Trade Unionists of the country, but they enjoy internal harmony, since there are no Protestants in Belgium to disturb the Catholic atmosphere or challenge the control of the clerical leaders.<sup>2</sup> The particular feature which we have to describe is that which gives the Belgian Labour movement its unique character—the remarkable relations of the

<sup>1</sup> In 1908, a large delegation of Belgian Trade Union secretaries visited Germany, and returned full of enthusiasm for the methods of organisation which it had seen. Between 1908 and 1913 no less than eighteen loose Federations were transformed into centralised Unions. In 1904 the total number of Trade Unionists affiliated to the *Commission Syndicale* (or General Federation) of Belgium was 34,184. In 1910 it had risen to 68,984, in 1912 to 116,935, and in 1913 to 126,745. In 1920 it was 650,000.

<sup>2</sup> The total number of persons employed in industry may be put at about one million. The Socialist Trade Unions (together with a few 'local' and Liberal Unions, which are really a very negligible force) include something over 150,000 of these. The Catholics claim to have 102,179 (1st July 1913). This figure is disputed by the Socialists—for various reasons too long to enter into here: on their estimate the Christian Unions would not number more than 70,000. The Christian Unions, it should be observed, are 'centralised' on the German system.

Socialist Trade Unions, the political Labour Party and the Co-operative movement.

The *Commission Syndicale*, or General Federation of Trade Unions, is not, like the German General Commission, simply a friendly ally of the political Socialists. It is practically a section of the Labour Party, and it includes among its members not only delegates of the affiliated Trade Unions, but two representatives of the political Party. Similarly the 215 Consumers' Co-operative Societies are all militant political organisations. The founders of the Belgian Co-operative movement a generation ago, indeed, deliberately set out "to use this form of association to create and develop a Socialist Party. What guided them, above all, was not the object of getting for themselves and their class merely cheaper bread,<sup>1</sup> but the pursuit of a political and social ideal which they desired to realise by the organisation of the proletariat. Without this ideal they could never have devoted themselves to the baking of bread, the selling of groceries, the opening of premises for the sale of beer, and the housing of the various working-class associations that were springing into existence."<sup>2</sup> Every member of the Co-operative Society, accordingly, is automatically

<sup>1</sup> The baking and selling of bread is the basis of the Co-operative movement in Belgium.

<sup>2</sup> See *Fédération des Sociétés Co-opératives Belges* (Office Co-opératif), *Congrès du 21 Août 1910*, p. 33. Ghent, 1910.



affiliated to the Labour Party, as his membership book expressly tells him. From the Trade Union point of view the Co-operators are model employers. In all the large societies, like the *Maison du Peuple* of Brussels, the *Vooruit* of Ghent, the *Progrès* of Jolimont, every member of the personnel, from the manager down to the porters, the grocery assistants and the waiters in the café, must be a Trade Unionist, and the wages and hours are far better than those prevailing outside.

Moreover, the premises of the Co-operative are invariably the headquarters of the local or national Trade Union organisation, as well as of the local or national committees of the Labour Party. Offices, meeting rooms, congress halls and libraries are put at their disposal, free or at a nominal rent, whilst considerable sums are given out of the profits to the Socialist and Trade Union propaganda and press.

In an industrial dispute the Co-operative not only affords, like the *Bourse du Travail* of the French Trades Council, a rallying place and headquarters for the Strike Committee, but can, and does, in the most effective way, supply out of its stores provisions for the strikers and their families. It is, in fact, impossible to exaggerate the extent to which in Belgium the success of the strike (and particularly of the general strike, which has been more successful

there than anywhere else) depends on the Co-operative movement.<sup>1</sup>

Whether this particular form of organisation is preferable to the German system, where each of the three forces preserves its autonomy, is a question which raises a controversy too large for us to discuss here. It is certain that the overwhelming mass of opinion in Belgium is satisfied with it, and it is useless to raise theoretical objections without taking into the fullest account the circumstances and the character of the people who have adopted it. It is equally certain, however, that there is not much sign of the Co-operative movement in this country being willing to bind itself in such a fashion. But it is not, after all, essential that it should do so. What really matters is that the British Trade Unionists should realise the possibilities and the value of the Co-operative movement in the struggle against Capitalism, and that the British Co-operators, on their side, should extend their vision beyond the next quarter's dividend.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See article in *The New Statesman*, 26th July 1913, "The Suffrage Agitation in Belgium," by C. M. L.

[See Chap. IX. below for general strikes in 1920.]

<sup>2</sup> Cf. below, Chap. X.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE PROBLEMS OF TRADE UNIONISM

Problems of Structure—Amalgamation and Federation—  
The Central Machinery : the Labour Party, the Trades  
Union Congress and the General Federation of Trade  
Unions—Problems of Management—Centralisation and  
Local Autonomy.

We come back now to the actual organisation of British Trade Unionism. Here, despite the progress that it has made, despite its great growth in numbers, there are, as we have said, very serious problems confronting the movement. The organisation of the workmen has not properly adapted itself to the developments of modern industry. The remarkable evolution of machinery, on the one hand, is more and more weakening the old craft distinctions, throwing processes and operatives, as it were, into the melting-pot, blurring the old lines of demarcation, displacing the tradesman by the labourer, the 'skilled' man by the 'unskilled' and 'semi-skilled.' On the other hand, the organisation of the employers has steadily advanced, and in many

an industrial dispute to-day Labour, in its struggle with Capital, is in the position of an army attacking a modern fortress with crossbows. Too often, again, the forces of Labour appear to be not an army at all, but a collection of independent bands, badly led, badly financed, and, worst of all, dissipating their energies in internecine quarrels. Among our 1200 and more Trade Unions there is a deplorable amount of confusion and overlapping, of competition for members, of jealousies between leaders, and of blacklegging on the part of the rank and file.<sup>1</sup>

How, then, is greater unity to be attained? The first problem is clearly one of structure, and the most heroic solution offered of this is the theory of Industrial Unionism, which, as originally propounded in America, set out to organise the workers not according to the nature of their particular craft, but, following the lines of capitalist organisation, according to the nature of their employers' business. Thus an engineer might be in a shipbuilding Union together with all the other mechanics, labourers, clerks, and so on, who are employed in a shipyard, or he might be in a miners', a municipal employees', or a textile or a railway Union. But this short way with sectionalism, plausible as it looks, is blocked in this country by serious practical difficulties, and

<sup>1</sup> For the changes in organisation and the development of problems since the war, see below, Chap. X.

when, further, it ignores vital professional differences, as it has done in the hands of the Industrial Workers of the World, its chances of success are not very great. It has, in fact, as Mr. Cole has shown in *The World of Labour*, broken down in the United States. "The Industrial Workers of the World" set themselves to revolutionise American Trade Unionism. They were faced, on the one hand, by the American Federation of Labour with the narrowest system of "craft Unionism" existing anywhere in the world, and, on the other hand, by a gigantic development of capitalism absorbing vast numbers of cheap, unskilled 'hands,' and pushing out the skilled men more rapidly and in a more wholesale fashion than anywhere in the world. Between these two classes—helots and aristocrats of Labour—lay an enormous gulf, and the attempt to bridge it by pretending it was not there was foredoomed to failure. The I.W.W. takes as its unit the 'local Industrial Union,' which embraces all the workers of a given industry in a town or district. These local Unions are combined into a National Industrial Union; the national Unions of closely allied industries into 'Departmental Organisations' (e.g. "Steam, Air, Water and Land National Associations of the Transport Industry, form the Transportation Department"); and the Industrial Departments themselves into the "General Organisation,"

and ultimately into an 'International Organisation.' On the other hand, the local Unions are to be subdivided into language branches (in order to meet the difficulties arising from the babel of immigrants), shop branches, department branches in large industries, district branches in big cities and widely extended areas, and Industrial District Councils, combining all the local Industrial Unions of the district. The one kind of grouping which is avoided is the 'craft' branch.<sup>1</sup>

But, as Mr. Cole observes, "there is no trace of the functioning of Industrial Councils, and there is only one National Union, that of the Textile Workers.<sup>2</sup> . . . In everything save theory, the I.W.W. is the 'One Big Union,' which is a denial of the 'Industrial' basis, a pure 'class' Unionism."

<sup>1</sup> See *The I.W.W. : Its History, Structure and Methods*, pamphlet by Vincent St. John, New York.

<sup>2</sup> This is the one really considerable organisation in the I.W.W. According to Mr. Tom Mann, the whole membership of the I.W.W. Unions does not amount to more than about 60,000, while the paying membership, according to the latest official Report (1925), was less than 30,000. Mr. Mann considers "the I.W.W. ought to work in harmony with the A.F.L. There is not the least necessity for two organisations. The field of action is vast enough for all to be able to work together in the economic struggle" (see article by Tom Mann, "Impressions d'Amérique," in *La Vie Ouvrière* (Paris), 28th December 1913). The American Federation of Labour which is the main body of Trade Unionism in the U.S.A., includes more than a hundred Unions (some in Canada). The four powerful "Railway Brotherhoods" are outside the A.F.L., though closely associated with it.

Craft interests, in short, are not to be so easily disposed of; the American Federation of Labour has easily withstood the attack, and what the Industrial Unionists have, in fact, achieved is something quite different from, though not perhaps less valuable than, what they started out to do. The I.W.W. "has sought one thing and found another; in seeking to unite skilled and unskilled, it has found out how to organise the great mass of the unskilled." This type of Industrial Unionism, however, has not taken any firm root on British soil. The more practical school of Industrial Unionists here do not desire to follow exactly the capitalist structure in grouping the workers, but rather to take as their basis the industry regarded as a unit of production (*e.g.* as given in the official Census of Production). Moreover, they avoid the mistake, which the I.W.W. has made, of attempting to build up new Unions apart from, and in antagonism to, the existing organisations of Labour, and most of them, at any rate, are alive to the importance of upholding genuine craft interests. Now, whatever may be the ultimate implications of this theory (which we cannot discuss more fully here), it is clear that its immediate line of advance is towards the German scheme of organisation.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Thus in a pamphlet by W. F. Watson (Hon. Sec. Metal, Engineering and Shipbuilding Amalgamation Committee), the

The Germans, as we have seen, developed in their forty-six Central Unions a highly efficient system, in which the vices of 'sectionalism' are practically

writer urges that instead of the 205 Unions which at present (1914) exist in these trades "there must be only one, to be brought about by the complete amalgamation of the existing Unions. The Industrial Union must embrace every worker, male and female, skilled or unskilled (so-called), irrespective of grade, craft, or sex, organised as a class determined upon securing better conditions now, and emancipation from wage slavery ultimately." But presently he proceeds to allow *district and craft autonomy* (which, of course, puts him in opposition to the I.W.W.). "Each craft," he says, "shall have its autonomous group because, be it remembered, although the different Unions may be amalgamated into one Union, the members will continue to work in their respective crafts, and will require means of attending to their craft interests. Therefore full freedom for each craft to initiate and decide matters concerning its own particular sections must be allowed. Thus there would be autonomous groups of fitters, turners, blacksmiths, plumbers, patternmakers, etc. etc., each looking after the technicalities of its own craft." Presumably he only means this autonomy to operate within very definite limits; otherwise, of course, he parts company from the Germans, and, indeed, reduces his proposals to an absurdity. It must be confessed, however, that there is considerable difficulty in reconciling the views of all those who profess the theory of Industrial Unionism. And in America there is even more confusion. Besides the I.W.W. organisation criticised above, there is another body calling itself by the same name, founded by the late Daniel De Leon, a well-known impossibilist Socialist. This group is of very little significance. More important, however, is the type of Industrial Unionism now beginning, as Mr. Cole says, to permeate the American Federation of Labour, and aiming at "the Union of all the skilled crafts of a single industry in one organisation, and not, except in rare cases, of all the workers in an industry." This, in fact, resembles pretty closely the 'amalgamation movement' in England. \*



eliminated, whilst all that is valuable in craft representation is recognised and protected. How far is it possible for British Trade Unionism to re-model itself on the German plan? It is plain, to begin with, that there is a certain amount of fusion which is not only desirable but comparatively easy. Rival organisations composed of men doing the same work, such as the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners and the General Union of Carpenters and Joiners, or the dozens of Labourers' Unions, have no adequate excuse for separate existence; and, in fact, many of those concerned recognise this clearly enough.<sup>1</sup> The real difficulty of sectionalism, however, is not the relations of two societies of carpenters or carters, but the relations of the carpenters as a craft to the other crafts in the building trade, of the carters as a whole to the other sections of transport workers. Now the obstacles to any universal scheme of amalgamation on the German model are very great. The age and power and vested interests, as well as the large financial differences, of many of the craft Unions in Great Britain present difficulties which neither the Germans nor any other nations have had to face in building up their Trade Union movements.

<sup>1</sup> The Carpenters' and Joiners' Unions, together with the Cabinet-makers, were in 1921 fused in the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers. And for combination among the Labourers' Unions, see below, Chap. X.

and the difficulties are enhanced by the 'practical' and opportunist temperament of the Briton, which makes him shy and even suspicious of theories.

Nevertheless these difficulties are not insuperable, and that the advantages of the German system are beginning to be appreciated is shown by the recent movements in the paper trades, among the Vehicle Workers and other bodies, and above all by the vast combination, now practically accomplished, which will unite 400,000 transport workers and general labourers. The main plan of this amalgamation is contained in the following proposals:—(1) the merging of the whole of the members in all the Unions concerned into one consolidated Union of Labour; (2) the creation of a Central Fund for dispute, legal aid, victimisation and administrative purposes, by means of an equal payment per member from the separate funds of each Union—"this sum per member to be as high as the funds of the least wealthy Union can afford, say, 2s. per member"; (3) a graduated scale of contributions and benefits (trade and friendly), framed in accordance with the wages and requirements of the classes of members covered by the new organisation; (4) a Central Executive, "which shall have complete control of the Central Fund, and shall sanction or withhold any disbursements according to Rules"; (5) "district and departmental sections, allowing full free play of

initiative and autonomy, consistent with the powers of financial control exercised by the Central Executive: these departments to make adequate provision for sectional and sub-sectional groupings, where necessary"; (6) the devising of means "to prevent the unnecessary migration of men from place to place, and thereby pressing on the available amount of employment at certain places, while making every attempt to widen the sphere of activity of the new organisation, and consequently creating easy means of transfer from one occupation to another."

That this ambitious scheme will have far-reaching effects it is impossible to doubt, though it is too early yet to predict exactly what they will be. One word of caution, however, must be uttered. It does not completely settle the question of unskilled labour. There are in almost every industry great masses of labourers—most of them detached from the skilled Unions, and either separately organised or not organised at all. The really effective method of dealing with these is to absorb them into the proper Unions of their trade—to abolish, in fact, the independent groupings of general labour altogether, as is done on the Continent. The Amalgamated Society of Engineers has recently opened its ranks to the unskilled, though it must be confessed the result so far has been disappointing. In many districts but little encouragement is given to the labourers to

come in, and even apart from this the terms offered, owing to high expenses of administration and to undercutting by general labour Unions, are not sufficiently attractive. Nevertheless it is valuable to have had the principle admitted, and it is to be hoped that other societies, and particularly the building trade Unions, the Bricklayers, the Stone Masons and the rest, will follow suit. The process of change must of necessity be slow; the existing Labour Unions will not succumb before a mere exposition of the continental theory. The hope is, as Mr. Cole has urged,<sup>1</sup> that the General Labour Union should be "a sort of Trade Union clearing-house, retaining only such members as could not well be permanently organised in any other way. As soon as a worker became permanently employed in some organised industry, the General Labour Union should surrender him to his appropriate society. . . . Its object should be to decasualise and unload its membership on other Unions, and not to retain all the members it can lay hands on." "If the new combination takes that view, and if the various 'skilled' Unions, on their side, will do their part, one of the most difficult of all the structural problems will be in a fair way to solution.

But even if amalgamation in general be the proper policy, this does not mean that nothing can

<sup>1</sup> See *The World of Labour*, pp. 238 ff.

be done until the Trade Union movement is completely converted. The plan of federation, which has been adopted in various trades, has, of course, brought a great measure of unity, and it is often considered to be sufficient without going to the length of complete fusion. Whether it is really so, is more than doubtful; but at least it may prove in certain cases to be a valuable step towards amalgamation. It is desirable, however, to be clear as to what sort of federation is contemplated. The various federations which we referred to in a previous chapter represent organisations of varying character and varying degrees of efficiency. In the cotton trade, for instance, there is an elaborate linking-up of all the different crafts—spinners, cardroom operatives, weavers and the rest—which, given the peculiar local conditions, has shown great strength and stability.<sup>1</sup> The Miners' Federation of Great Britain, on the other hand, though, like the textile organisations, it covers the industry effectively enough, is weak in its central control and its central finance. And the Transport Workers' Federation suffers from the same defect, a defect which was made only too plain in the disastrous London Dock Strike of 1912.<sup>2</sup> In the building industry, with its

<sup>1</sup> There is, however, a growing feeling in Lancashire in favour of "One Cotton Union," as against this federal organisation.

<sup>2</sup> For later developments in the transport, building and other industries, see below, Chap. X.

welter of separate Unions, there was until recently no national federation at all, and the local federations continued to be severely handicapped by the fact that they were not properly recognised by the Central Executives of the Unions, and so were in a chronic state of want.

We cannot, of course, attempt here to criticise the federal organisation in every industry, still less to suggest how it should be reformed. But the reader will find, if he examines inter-Union relations in the different trades, that the test of efficient federation is always to be found in the combination of a strong central fund and adequate central control with the greatest possible degree of Union autonomy. The weakness of a federation naturally tends to lie in the excessive independence of its affiliated units, just as the natural defect of an amalgamation is in its tendency to place too much power in the Central Executive. Whether amalgamation or federation is the better method to pursue must clearly be decided by the conditions in each industry, and it is impossible to argue from one industry to another, without a close inquiry into the particular circumstances. But in every case the answer to the question, whether a craft basis or an industrial basis should be aimed at, is the same. Both must be preserved, and, so far as possible, harmonised. The craft interest must not

be allowed to interfere with the organisation of the industry as a whole; the organisation of the industry as a whole must not be such as to obscure the individuality of the craft.

Short of any complete system of federation, a good deal may be effected in one way or another by working agreements between different Unions. One of the most serious causes of friction, however—the question of demarcation of work—obstinately refuses to yield to this form of treatment. The various Boards of Conciliation and Arbitration which deal with this question in the building, engineering, ship-building and other trades, spend a great deal of time and effort in achieving a very small success. The fact is that these disputes ought never to occur—at any rate never except on the borders of different industries—and if the Unions were properly organised, they would practically disappear. With a Metalworkers' Union, or a close-knit federation in the building industry, there would be no place for wrangles between engineers and plumbers, or slaters and bricklayers. The attempt to maintain the 'right to a craft' is, in the present stage of industrial development, a sheer absurdity; the only matter of serious concern is the maintenance of the standard rate for the process. Agreements for joint action in certain cases, however, are valuable. Thus the linking of the three organisations of

the miners, the railwaymen and the transport workers, a gigantic alliance covering over a million and a quarter men, is a very desirable piece of consolidation; indeed, the forging of such links throughout the movement is a necessary complement to the internal organisation of the separate industries.

We pass now to the last, but not the least important, of the structural reforms which confront the Trade Unions. The central co-ordinating machinery is weaker in Britain than anywhere else. We have already indicated in a previous chapter the confusion and overlapping, as well as the defective control, which result from the present relations of the Trades Union Congress, the General Federation of Trade Unions and the Labour Party—a state of things to which neither Germany nor Belgium nor France offers any parallel. The Trades Union Congress was criticised twenty years ago by Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Webb in *Industrial Democracy*, as “an unorganised public meeting, unable to formulate any consistent or practical policy”; and that description is still true to-day. Moreover, to make matters worse, despite the advent of the Labour Party, the Parliamentary Committee of the Congress steadily refuses to abandon any of its old political activities. Neither it nor the General Federation has any effective power over the affiliated Unions,



and the Federation is not only weak constitutionally, but numerically and financially also. It is clear that there are two necessary reforms—the one the negative task of preventing overlapping, the other the positive task of extending and defining the powers of the central organisation.<sup>1</sup> As to the first, we need not here argue the question of whether a Trade Union movement ought to be directly implicated in political action, as it is in this country or Belgium or Denmark, or whether it should be quite independent of the political organisation, as in Germany.<sup>2</sup> There is no adequate reason why the Unions should

<sup>1</sup> The Labour Party Conference in 1912 passed a resolution, moved by the Miners' Federation, to the effect that the Labour Party Conference should attend to urgent political questions, and leave the Trades Union Congress "to deal with industrial questions and all matters affecting the Trade Union movement not of a political nature." But the Parliamentary Committee would not consent to any such arrangement. The Executive of the Labour Party, in their Annual Report in 1914, expressed their great regret at this attitude, and recorded their "convinced opinion that the present condition of affairs in the industrial and political Labour movement demands a closer unity than has hitherto been achieved. Repeated attempts in past years have proved fruitless, and it is a remarkable inconsistency that national organisations which are constantly using their efforts to reconcile and unify the interests of sectional Trade Unions, are not more fully alive to the immense possibilities that lie in the path of a consolidated industrial and political movement such as the needs of British Labour so insistently demand."

<sup>2</sup> The further alternative, that it should not be merely independent, but entirely opposed, to parliamentary action, as in France, raises a larger issue, which is discussed in a later chapter.

not be both properly organised industrially, and direct participants in political action.

But in any case, it is generally admitted that there ought to be some clear line of demarcation between the political and industrial activities, and there ought to be one, and only one, central industrial organisation. This means that the General Federation and the Trades Union Congress should coalesce to form the supreme council of the Trade Union movement in the industrial sphere, while the Parliamentary Committee should disappear with all the purely political business into the Labour Party. Such a re-organisation is a fairly simple matter, and it is bound to come in time. And when it does come, there are important functions waiting to be performed by this supreme committee, including the work of general education and propaganda, organisation in the backward industries, the improvement of the Labour press and the creation of a proper statistical department.<sup>1</sup>

But if the Trade Union movement suffers from a confusion of authority on the political side, it has long suffered on the other side from its distant relations with the Co-operative movement. We have seen the immense value derived by the Germans, and still more by the Belgians, from the position occupied by the Co-operatives in their national

<sup>1</sup> This reorganisation was achieved in 1920. See description of the "General Staff" in Chap. X.

Labour movements, and the isolation of the Co-operators in this country cannot but be regarded as a serious weakness. Attempts have, indeed, been made to bring about some measure of unity. Representatives of the Co-operative Union, the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party got so far in 1913 as to draw up a recommendation for a permanent joint committee. This 'United Co-operative and Labour Board' was, amongst other things, to bring the three sections into close touch for educational and propaganda purposes; to encourage the Trade Unions to make their investments and do their banking business through Co-operative agencies; and "to consider how far it is desirable and possible to ensure the unrestricted distribution of food supplies or the payment of benefit during important trade disputes, by issuing through the various branches of the Co-operative Movement food-coupons or loans on the security of Trade Union assets, thereby obviating the necessity of the Union realising investments at a period that might involve serious loss to the funds." The Annual Congress of the Co-operative movement, however, decided that political dissension must at all costs be avoided, and that 'no union with the Labour Party was possible, and for the moment, therefore, negotiations were broken off. But even if the Co-operators continue to regard the Labour Party as a

stumbling-block, there is no reason why they should not establish—what, after all, is the really important thing in the struggle against Capitalism—definite and close relations with the Trade Union movement on its industrial side.<sup>1</sup>

The second great problem before us is that of internal government. Our account of the German and French Trade Union movements has presented two opposite models of organisation, the one based on extreme centralisation of control, the other allowing extreme local autonomy. The British Trade Unions stand at various points between these two extremes, without the discipline and docility which characterise the German working class, without that enthusiastic conception of liberty which makes the normal Frenchman regard the German system with such repugnance.<sup>2</sup> They have, for the most part, developed in a more or less haphazard fashion, and their sound, practical instinct naturally

<sup>1</sup> See below, Chap. X., for the Co-operative position in 1921.

<sup>2</sup> Many British Unions have gone far in the centralisation of their funds, though this has not always been accompanied by a corresponding centralisation of control. Some, like the Boilermakers, have completely separated the fighting funds from the ordinary benefits, putting the payment of dispute benefit and the initiation and sanction of disputes entirely in the Executive Council's hands. Others, like some of the Miners, are in a confused condition, the lodges often enjoying an excessive degree of independence, while the Miners' Federation of Great Britain itself is hampered by the fact that it can only raise strike funds through special levies, as well as by its slow and cumbrous machinery for the declaration of strikes.

has been to combine the advantages of both systems. But this has frequently resulted merely in the attempt to eat their cake and have it, and it is now becoming clearer and clearer to the thinking men in the Trade Union world that they will have to put themselves on a firm basis. A Union with a weak Central Executive and branches enjoying a large independence is not the form of organisation suited to the general conditions of industrial warfare to-day. Nor are guerilla fighting, sporadic and spontaneous strikes, the tactics most suited to the British temperament. The history of recent disputes—on the railways, in the coal-fields of South Wales, at the London docks, in the Lancashire cotton mills—shows the overwhelming superiority of central control over local autonomy.

But at this point comes the inevitable conflict of efficiency and freedom. Will not such a centralisation of control simply deliver the Trade Unions bound hand and foot to an intolerable bureaucracy? The problem of the official is indeed quite a serious one. Without subscribing to all the wild suspicion and abuse of 'leaders,' which are so fashionable in certain circles, one can recognise how easy it is for a Trade Union official to become an autocrat,<sup>1</sup> and

<sup>1</sup> The problem is rendered still more difficult by the well-known unwillingness of Trade Unionists to dismiss, or to refuse to re-elect, their officials. Men who are supposed to be widely unpopular are re-elected over and over again; and many Trade Union secretaries

the crude views of democracy prevalent in so many Trade Union branches do not, it must be confessed, offer much of a check. One very ancient device to prevent the growth of a governing caste is to limit more or less narrowly the term of office for which a man may serve. Thus the Stone Masons do not permit a member to sit on the Executive for more than two years consecutively, while the Operative Bricklayers only allow two years' tenure of office in any six years. But this, while it perhaps prevents enjoy, as it has been said, a permanency of tenure equal to that of a High Court judge.

It may perhaps be desirable to remind the reader, who is not very familiar with the Trade Union movement, that the Union official is not quite the same thing as the State official whose interference is so offensive to many liberty-loving citizens. This political officer—the civil servant—is the expert administrator acting under the authority of a responsible Minister. But the Trade Union official is commonly the civil servant and the Minister in one—and a Minister, too, who is in practice not nearly so closely controlled as are the members of the national Government. The objection made to him, therefore, is not analogous to the feeling against inspectors, tax-collectors and the like, but rather to that against an autocratic leader.

So far as the 'civil servant' functions of his officials are concerned, the ordinary Trade Unionist does not trouble himself, as much as he perhaps ought, about the matter. Some Unions, it is true, have been at pains to secure the service of efficient experts. Among the Lancashire cotton operatives, for instance, the officials, who require a high degree of knowledge of all the complex details of the industry, are subjected to an elaborate examination system. But many others do not realise the value of having properly trained men for their business: they expect the same person to be equally capable of negotiating with employers, of administering the Insurance Act and of performing the duties of a Member of Parliament.

a committee-man from becoming a despot, tends also to put the General Secretary in a still stronger position. Some of the French Unions, especially in the building trades in Paris, more logical, go so far as to make their secretaries and other officers not re-eligible after a year or two years' service. But this practice again produces its own nemesis by weakening the administration. Other societies, like the Engineers, the Carpenters and Joiners or the Boilermakers, going beyond this primitive method, have attempted to balance the power of the General Secretary by a committee or council of elected representatives. But experience has shown that this is only partially successful. It is likely to result either in a lamentable friction between the executive and General Secretary, such as was seen a few years ago in the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, or in a practical combination between the Secretary and the executive, which amounts to a strengthening of the very thing that it was desired to prevent. This, in fact, was what occurred a generation ago in the Boilermakers' Society, where, as Mr. and Mrs. Webb pointed out,<sup>1</sup> Mr. Robert Knight, the able General Secretary, was a sort of permanent Prime Minister, with the nominally independent District Delegates as his Cabinet. And something of the same sort might very easily result from the "Syndicalist"

<sup>1</sup> See *Industrial Democracy*, p. 30.

proposals for the management of the South Wales coal-field, under which the present 'districts' would be abolished, and the whole organisation controlled by a monthly meeting of delegates from the lodges, the officials simply being their servants.<sup>1</sup> It is not difficult to see that the "rank and file" would have their work cut out to prevent those officials becoming masters of the situation!

The fact is that, whether we like it or not, officials are a necessity in the complicated Trade Union democracy. The Trade Union movement needs leadership—not 'bossing,' but clear and bold guidance—as much as it ever needed it, and the policy of sowing distrust of every elected officer throughout the Unions can only end in disaster. But this does not mean that all Trade Union leaders are the best and wisest that can be found, and that the whole membership owes them a sheeplike obedience. Blind loyalty is not the stuff of which a genuine democracy is made. A more effective control over officials will only be secured by a better understanding of what representative government really means.

We have already referred to the 'representative

<sup>1</sup> See *The Miners' Next Step* (Davies, Tonypandy, 1912). It should be observed that the authors of this pamphlet, like many other strong opponents of officialdom, are not against centralisation. On the contrary, they support it as a means of extending the sphere of democracy and "killing the parochialism and petty leadership," which are fostered by excessive local autonomy.



institutions' of the Lancashire cotton trade, though, as has been pointed out, the peculiar localisation of that trade makes it a difficult model for other industries, and to the constitution of the National Union of Railwaymen. This is of very great importance, since, like the German Metalworkers' Union, and unlike some other British Unions, it does establish what is essential to a sound system of popular government, a due representation of distinct craft and local interest. The Railwaymen have recognised clearly enough the importance of centralisation, and have deliberately laid it down that the Executive Committee shall have the power "to inaugurate, conduct and settle all trade movements, and the method of conducting such movements shall be determined by the Executive Committee as circumstances warrant." But this absolute official control is substantially tempered by the admirable provisions for the election and responsibility of those officials. The Union, as we have shown, is divided into six electoral districts, with a subdivision within the district into four electoral departments, embracing locomotive, traffic, goods and cartage, and engineering-shop and permanent-way men, whilst the Executive itself is divided into four corresponding Departmental Committees, each responsible for the interests of its particular section. "Thus," as Mr. Cole says, "in the electoral district the

local unit is recognised, and, in the electoral department within the district, the interest of the sections in each locality; while the Departmental Committees are a recognition that sectional interests are national as well as local. Where the interest concerned is that of the employees of a particular Railway Company, or where for some reason adequate sectional representation is not secured by these provisions, special conferences of those concerned may be called. Thus, at every step, the Executive is at least certain of ascertaining clearly the feeling of the sections or localities involved, and, where this is so, it matters less in whose hands the final power is placed.”<sup>1</sup>

It is not to be supposed, of course, that this system can be applied universally, in all its details, any more than can that of the cotton operatives; the conditions of the industry will largely determine the form of constitution in each case. The concentration of the textile industries, the general uniformity in the coal-fields, the multiplicity of crafts in the metal trades, the natural localism in the building industry, must all influence the machinery of organisation. But in every case centralised funds and centralised control are required in one form or another, and in every case that control must be reconciled with the real will of the whole society by the proper representation of localities and sectional interests.

<sup>1</sup> *The World of Labour*, p. 263.

## CHAPTER IX

### TRADE UNIONS IN THE WAR AND AFTER

Effects of the War on Trade Union Conditions—Strength of Labour at the Armistice—Renewal of the Industrial Struggle—The Coal-mines Dispute—The Railway Strike—"The Council of Action."

ON the eve of the great war, as we have seen in an earlier chapter, the situation in the industrial world was one of severe strain. Labour, disappointed with the smallness of its achievements by legislation and lending a readier ear to counsels of direct action, was becoming more and more restive. The employers on their side were watchful and truculent. Though the disputes actually in progress were few, graver ones were threatened. But the catastrophe of August, 1914, immediately stilled this domestic strife. The Trade Unions were for the moment forced to bend all their energies to coping with the new problems caused by the dislocation of trade, with its accompaniment of widespread unemployment and distress. Those problems, however, soon solved

themselves, as the younger men flocked to the colours, and industry adapted itself to providing for the needs of the armies in the field and of the nation at home.

Early in 1915, as the cost of living began to rise, there was a fresh outbreak of disputes in a number of industries—mining, the railways, engineering, woodworking, building, transport, textile—over wage-advances or ‘war-bonuses.’ But these were of small moment beside the arduous struggle with which the Trade Unions soon found themselves confronted. It was evident that the industry of the country had to be practically transformed; vast numbers of extra workers were required for the making of munitions, equipment and the like, and there must be an intense speeding-up in all the factories and workshops. The Government presently demanded a wholesale abrogation by the Trade Unions of the rules and customs which had been so laboriously built up for the protection of their standard of life. Lines of demarcation between skilled and unskilled jobs, or between trade and \*trade, apprenticeship regulations, restrictions on the employment of women, limitations of overtime, even Factory Act provisions for health and safety—all, or most of them, were to be suspended for the duration of the war. Above all, the legal right to strike, which had been enjoyed for nearly a century, was to

be abandoned in those industries judged vital to the prosecution of the war, all disputes being submitted to compulsory arbitration. To these sacrifices the Unions reluctantly but patriotically agreed, and the new code was eventually elaborated in a series of statutes, the Munitions of War Acts of 1915, 1916 and 1917, and a mass of orders and circulars. That great anxiety was felt at the risk that was being taken goes without saying, and the anxiety was shown later to have been justified; for after the war, when the time came for restoring the old conditions, the Government and the employers showed themselves by no means anxious to redeem their solemn pledges, and it was only with difficulty that many of the pre-war standards were re-established.<sup>1</sup>

But, though the first and most obvious effect of the war was thus to chain up the Unions, there were compensating advantages, which in the end proved to have outweighed the temporary weakening. Their status was actually enhanced; for both in the establishment of the new industrial conditions and in their application throughout the war, the Trade Union leaders had to be consulted and negotiated

<sup>1</sup> See *History of Trade Unionism* (edition of 1920), by S. and B. Webb; *Women in Trade Unions*, and *Women in the Engineering Trades*, by Barbara Drake, and *Labour in War Time*, by G. D. H. Cole (valuable for the period down to the middle of 1915); and *The Restoration of Trade Union Conditions*, by S. Webb (1917).

with by the Government on terms of practical equality. It was plain, in a word, that Trade Unionism was a real power in the State; indeed, the Government was literally dependent on the goodwill and co-operation of the Unions for the organisation of labour and the prosecution of the war. Moreover, contrary to the expectations of many, the membership of the Unions did not diminish, but enormously increased.<sup>1</sup> The mass of the new entrants into industry, and not least the women 'dilutees,' who poured into munition work or took the places of men on the railways or trams or in other trades, joined their Unions, and many of the 'old hands,' who had been previously indifferent, now realised the advantage and necessity of organising themselves. For it was abundantly clear that the Trade Unions alone stood between the workers and the most disastrous exploitation, whether in the matter of low wages or excessively hard conditions of labour. The attempts to sweat the women munition-workers in the earlier part of the war were peculiarly flagrant, and the greatest credit is due to the National Federation of Women Workers<sup>2</sup> and

<sup>1</sup> The total membership, which at the outbreak of the war was less than 4,000,000, had reached about 6½ million by the date of the Armistice. Women Trade Unionists (excluding the teachers) rose from 358,000 to well over 1,000,000 in the same period.

<sup>2</sup> In 1921 the Women Workers' Section of the National Union of General Workers.

the late Mary MacArthur and her fellow-leaders for the struggle they waged against these attempts. Their efforts, though they did not ensure the women all they should have got, did immensely improve their position, and what was achieved by and for the munition-workers reacted favourably on the wages of women in other occupations.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, there were below the surface signs of a profounder discontent in the more rebellious wing of the Trade Union movement. This did not, it is true, become of any great practical importance during the actual period of war, since the working class as a whole was as firmly set as other classes on "seeing it through." Nevertheless there were, as early as 1915 and 1916, significant premonitory symptoms, in the strikes of the South Wales miners and the Clyde engineers. The causes of these outbreaks were partly psychological and partly economic. There was a small, but not uninfluential, section of Labour opposed from the beginning to the war, whether on general pacifist principles or on the view that this war was an affair of capitalist governments, with whom the proletariat had no business to make common cause. And when the Government and the employers attempted to impose particularly objectionable conditions in regard to wages and

<sup>1</sup> See *Women in Trade Unions*, by Barbara Drake, especially ch. v.

women's work on the engineering trade, the bolder spirits found their influence decidedly increased, even among the workmen who had little intellectual sympathy with their outlook. In Wales peace was restored after a struggle by the intervention of Ministers and the concession of a large part of the men's claims. On the Clyde the ferment was never completely suppressed, until in 1917 the Government took the drastic step of arresting and deporting the leaders of revolt. This ferment undoubtedly left its mark spiritually. And one practical development, at least, which must be dated from the Clyde troubles, is the Shop Stewards' movement, of which more will be said hereafter.

When the fighting ended in 1918, the British Labour movement was certainly stronger than it had ever been before. It had gained in numbers, in status and in self-confidence. In the political field, the prospects were good. The Labour Party had during the most critical part of the war loyally,—there were some who thought too loyally—supported the Coalition Government. It had, it is true, in the course of the last year received some rebuffs, owing to its anxiety to find a way of putting an end to the bloodshed. Nevertheless, it seemed to stand high in popular favour; it had remodelled its constitution so as to admit freely any individuals, whether of the working class or middle class, in agreement with its



policy; it had a generous programme of reform at home and it stood for peace with honour abroad. The General Election of December, however, disappointed the hopes of Labour. The majority of the electorate indulged itself in a final spasm of hate, was comparatively indifferent to reforms at home, and for Peace terms wanted vengeance and reparations. Many of the Labour candidates, even those who had fought in the war, were decried as 'pacifists' or 'pro-Germans,' and only 57 out of 361 were returned.<sup>1</sup>

In the industrial sphere, the situation was at first uncertain. Large hopes were entertained by politicians, by many middle-class people of genuine goodwill, and even by some of the working class, that a new era of peace in industry was about to dawn. Government Committees had been for a long time past working out schemes of 'reconstruction.' Machinery for the improvement of the relations between employers and employed had been elaborated, notably in the shape of Joint Industrial Councils, or Whitley Councils as they are popularly called. Optimists even thought that the Trade Unions, now accustomed to compulsory arbitration, might be induced to accept it as a permanent institution and relegate the strike to limbo.

<sup>1</sup> Three 'Independent Labour' members and one Co-operator afterwards joined the Party.

But it soon became clear that the vision of industrial peace was a mirage. The whole working class was seething with unrest. The reaction against the long strain at home and the discipline in the field showed itself both among the civilians and in the returning soldiers. The collapse of the Great Empires in Europe and Asia and the triumph of the proletarian revolution in Russia excited new and dangerous thoughts. Presently there succeeded a profound disillusionment, as the Peace Conference at Paris steadily whittled away the new idealism, whilst at home both employers and the Government showed the utmost reluctance to restore the Trade Union practices which had been suspended "for the duration of the war." Meantime, economic conditions were worsening. The cost of living still mounted—in the summer of 1918 it had been 105 per cent. above the pre-war level; at the end of the year it was 125 per cent. above. Profiteering was rampant. Unemployment, due to the demobilisation of the armies and of the civilian 'war-workers,' was growing rapidly. Thus it was that, partly driven by sheer material pressure, partly in a spirit of vague discontent, partly under the inspiration of more definite 'revolutionary' ideas (of which we shall say more in a moment), Labour plunged again into the industrial fight.

During the year 1919 the number of trade dis-

putes recorded by the Ministry of Labour reached a total of 1413, involving no less than 2,586,000 workpeople. The most important of these struggles occurred in the four great industries of coal-mining, engineering, transport and textiles. In the majority of cases they were concerned with wages or hours, though a few were fought on questions of demarcation, Trade Union recognition, and so on. But throughout, though the immediate claims might be purely economic, there was, becoming more and more audible, another demand—the demand for the ‘democratic control of industry.’ This we shall discuss more fully later on; here it will be enough to say that this new spirit—new, at least in its emphasis—has been the distinctive note of the industrial conflict as a whole since the war.

No statistics, of course, can give much idea of the character of this conflict. Nor even do these figures of disputes, high as they are, show the full extent of the upheaval. In 1919, indeed, they were within an ace of being swollen by a complete stoppage in the coal mines. Early in the year the miners put forward a triple claim, comprising (1) a 30 per cent. advance in wages (exclusive of the ‘war wage’ of 3s.), (2) the substitution of ‘six’ for ‘eight’ in the so-called Miners’ Eight Hours Act of 1908—a reform which would still have left the average working day at just under seven hours, and (3) the

nationalisation of all the mines and minerals. Abortive negotiations took place with the Government on these demands, and a ballot was held to decide whether a general strike should be declared. At the eleventh hour, however, the danger was averted by the appointment of a Royal Commission to consider the whole matter and report without delay. The Commission was composed of three representatives of the coal-owners, three business men nominated by the Government, three miners' officials, and three persons (Sir Leo Chiozza Money, Mr. Sidney Webb, and Mr. R. H. Tawney) not connected with the industry but acceptable to the miners' side, with a judge of the High Court, Sir John Sankey, as Chairman. The inquiry was pushed through rapidly, and by 20th March a Report—or rather three Reports—appeared. The coal-owners recommended an advance of 1s. 6d. a day for persons over sixteen, and 9d. a day for boys under sixteen, with a nominal seven-hour day underground and eight hours for surface-workers. The miners, and the three other Commissioners who signed their Report, recommended that the miners' demands should be conceded. The third Report, signed by the Chairman and the remaining members, recommended a seven-hour day underground and an increase of 2s. (with 1s. for boys under sixteen), and, while not agreeing immediately to

the principle of nationalisation, stated that "even upon the evidence already given, the present system of ownership and working in the coal industry stands condemned, and some other system must be substituted for it, either nationalisation or a method of unification by national purchase and/or by joint control." The Government declared its intention of adopting the Sankey Report "in spirit and in letter," and after a short interval the Commission began its second stage. This was concluded in June, when four separate Reports were issued. The employers were implacably hostile to nationalisation. One member, Sir Arthur Duckham, favoured a scheme of management by publicly controlled 'trusts' or amalgamations of colliery companies. Mr. Justice Sankey and the miners both advocated national ownership, though the miners were anxious for a larger share for the workers in the management of the industry. The Government now, however, to the indignant surprise of the miners, changed their front, and the Prime Minister declared definitely against nationalisation. The Unions were not in a position at the moment to enforce their demands by a strike, and they set themselves, with the official support of all the Labour bodies, to a campaign of propaganda in the country. The result so far, therefore, was that the miners had gained an advance in wages and a reduction of hours, but had been balked

in their larger aim. There was no real settlement, but rather an exacerbation of feeling on both sides, and a certainty of further trouble before long.

\* In the autumn of 1919 occurred another great spectacular contest. The railwaymen had without any difficulty secured an eight-hour day, which came into operation on 1st February. But the adjustment of their wages, or 'standardisation' as it was called, was another matter. Negotiations between the Unions and the Government had dragged on all through the spring and summer. In August a settlement was made with the drivers and firemen, organised in the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen, but the terms offered 'definitively' to the rest of the railway workers were such as could not be accepted by their organisation, the National Union of Railwaymen. In the middle of September, therefore, a dangerous crisis was reached. It is impossible here to go into the details of the events that led to the final explosion. There was a widespread belief that the Government wished to drive the men to desperate action in order to break them. It certainly had made all preparations for beating them should a strike be declared. It was argued on the Government's behalf that its intentions had been grievously misunderstood, and that there was no justification for the charge that wages were actually to be reduced. But it is certain

that, if there was a misunderstanding, the Government's tortuous behaviour was mainly responsible for it. In any case there was a deadlock, and on 24th September a national strike was ordered at forty-eight hours' notice. It lasted for nine days, and it was in many ways veritably 'a nine days' wonder.'

Practically the whole of the manual workers on the railways came out. The drivers and firemen, members of the Associated Society, loyally supported their comrades of the N.U.R. The clerical and administrative staffs, organised in the Railway Clerks' Association, remained at their posts, but refused to act as strike-breakers. On the other hand, the excellence of the Government's preparations was at once revealed. Fleets of motor lorries were used for the supply of food, whilst a few trains were kept running each day by volunteers, mostly of the upper classes, aided by a handful of 'blacklegs.' The bitterest feeling was caused, not only among the railwaymen but throughout the working class, by the relish with which many of these amateurs threw themselves into the work of "smashing the Unions." And their indignation was heightened by the attitude of the Prime Minister, who labelled the strike an "anarchist conspiracy," and of the Press, which denounced it as a crime against the community. It was remarkable in the circumstances that there was practically no violence in any part

of the country. Another notable feature was the assistance given to the strikers by the Co-operative movement, an assistance without which the Union would have been hard put to it to carry on.

But what was perhaps most remarkable of all was the way in which the contest was fought out. Both sides conducted an organised publicity campaign in the newspapers, by advertisements, articles, statistics and cartoons, on the screen of the cinema and on the hoardings in the streets. In this campaign the railwaymen started at a disadvantage, save for their one asset in the shape of the Labour paper, the *Daily Herald*. But within a week it was plain that their case was beginning to be understood by the distracted public, and was, in fact, winning on its merits. Eventually negotiations were renewed, and, mainly through the mediation of a number of Labour officials representing various sections of the Trade Union movement and the Labour Party, an agreement was reached and the strike was called off. The terms of settlement were claimed as a victory by each side; in fact, they were a compromise which gave the railwaymen a good deal of what they were demanding. In its broader aspects this struggle offered some significant lessons both to capital and labour. The Government learned that the crushing of Trade Unionism was by no means an easy task. The Unions learned that if they were to engage



in contests not merely with particular bodies of employers but with the State, either as protagonist or standing in reserve, so to speak, with all its resources, there must be a better organisation than the Labour movement at present possesses. And the general public at the same time learned that the new fashion of calling any large industrial dispute a "strike against the community" makes but little appeal to the workmen, who can put two and two together as easily as can a Cabinet Minister or a journalist.

The situation in 1920 was not essentially different from that of 1919. There were 1715 disputes, involving 2,019,000 workpeople; but, save in the coal mines and engineering, which accounted respectively for 1,414,000 and 152,000 of this total, they were of less magnitude. As in the previous year, however, there was much unrest which did not actually break into strikes. Another national stoppage on the railways was barely averted in the autumn. There was considerable trouble over the question of 'ex-service men' in the engineering trades, and still more in the building industry, where a wrangle continued throughout the year between the National Federation of Building Trades Operatives and the Government. A strike in the transport industry was avoided by the reference of the claim for a minimum wage of 16s. a day for dock labour to a

### Court of Inquiry under the new Industrial Courts Act.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Industrial Courts Act, 1919, sets up (1) an Industrial Court, appointed by the Minister of Labour from employers, workmen, women and 'independent' persons. To this Court the Minister may refer any trade dispute, either actual or apprehended: or he may refer the dispute to arbitrators appointed by him, or to a board of arbitration representing the employers and workmen, with a chairman appointed by himself. In a trade where conciliation or arbitration machinery already exists, disputes may not be referred to the Court without the consent of both sides. There is no penalty attaching to a failure to comply with the Court's award. (2) Part II. sets up Courts of Inquiry, consisting of persons nominated by the Minister, who may refer any existing or apprehended dispute to them. The Court of Inquiry takes evidence on oath, which may be published by the Minister, and issues reports, which must immediately be laid before Parliament. This measure, as originally drafted, contained clauses which virtually established compulsory arbitration and made Trade Union funds liable for strikes of their members against the arbitrators' decisions. These, however, met with determined opposition from Labour, and were dropped. The dockers' inquiry was remarkable for several reasons. Their case was put with great ability by Mr. Ernest Bevin, of the Dockers' Union, and was based mainly on the necessity of a better standard of life as well as on the rise in the cost of living. The Court, in its judgment, rejected the principle of the 'sliding scale' basis of payment, and insisted that a living wage should mean "a right to have life ordered upon a higher standard." And it was severe upon the scandalous system of casual labour which used men "as the spare parts of an industrial machine." The principal recommendations were (1) a 16s. minimum per day on the basis of the 44 hours' week; (2) registration of all dock labour and maintenance of unemployed casual labour; (3) the constitution of a 'Whitley Council' for the docks. (See *Report by a Court of Inquiry concerning Transport Workers—Wages and Conditions of Employment of Dock Labour*, 1920. H.M. Stationery Office. 3d.) This was a notable victory for the Union, and undoubtedly did much to stimulate interest and self-confidence in the workers.

The contest between the Government and the miners began anew in the autumn. The miners had been restive all through the year, dissatisfied as they were with their own wages, the high cost of coal as well as of other articles of necessity, and the whole finance and administration of the industry as conducted by the Government and the employers. They now claimed that the surplus profits were such as to allow of an increased wage for themselves and a reduction in coal prices to the public. The second of these claims, which was denounced by the Government and by the greater part of the Press, was presently dropped, and after fruitless negotiations issue was joined on the demand for an immediate wage advance, with the promise of an impartial inquiry into the possibility of reducing prices. The Government denied that higher wages could be afforded by the industry, unless the miners would guarantee a greater output, and this vexed question of output eventually became the crux of the dispute. After a three weeks' stoppage of all the pits in the country a settlement was agreed upon. An advance of wage was conceded, which, however, should vary according to the aggregate output of the industry, whilst a new national wage scheme was to be prepared jointly by the coal-owners and miners. This basis of payment was, in the circumstances of the industry, a ridiculous one, as well as being vicious

in principle. But it is not likely to be permanent, and indeed was only accepted with reluctance by the miners as a way out of a situation from which they were anxious to escape.

The struggle as a whole did not appeal to the public sympathy as had the railwaymen's case twelve months previously. The Press, which was almost unanimously hostile, had long before the actual rupture been monotonously chanting the tune of the "crime against the community," and it was the weak points rather than the strong points of the miners' case that were allowed to leak out.<sup>1</sup> For the Trade Union movement itself the main lesson was again the necessity for better organisation; for it was revealed to all the world that the sectional interests and policies of the three partners in the Triple Alliance<sup>2</sup> were tending to turn that formidable monster into a white elephant, if not an actual danger to Labour.

<sup>1</sup> For the miners' case, see *Facts about the Coal Dispute*, published by the Triple Industrial Alliance, 2d. ; and for a record of the strike and the terms of settlement, see *Monthly Circular* of the Labour Research Department, vol. vii, Nos. 4, 5 and 6.

<sup>2</sup> The Triple Industrial Alliance, comprising the Miners' Federation, the National Union of Railwaymen and the Transport Workers' Federation, was established in 1915 (though not formally constituted till 1917). It is based on the desire for better co-ordination between the great inter-dependent industries of coal and transport, and has an elaborate constitution regulating the powers and duties of the three bodies. See articles in the *Labour Year Book*, 1916 and 1919, and *Trade Unionism on the Railways*, by G. D. H. Cole and R. P. Arnot, ch. xiv.

Apart from trade disputes proper, the outstanding event of 1920 was the sudden and unexpected use of the industrial weapon for a purely political purpose. Early in August there appeared to be a grave danger that the Government, under militarist and anti-Bolshevik pressure, would rush the country to the help of Poland against the Soviet armies. While affairs were on a razor edge, a joint conference of the Trades Union Congress and Labour Party Executives was called on August 9th at a few hours' notice, and the following resolution was passed:—

“That this Joint Conference, representing the Trades Union Congress, the Labour Party and the Parliamentary Labour Party, feels certain that war is being engineered between the Allied Powers and Soviet Russia on the issue of Poland, and declares that such a war would be an intolerable crime against humanity: it therefore warns the Government that the whole industrial power of the organised workers will be used to defeat this war.

“That the Executive Committees of affiliated organisations throughout the country be summoned to hold themselves ready to proceed to London for a National Conference.

“That they be advised to instruct their members to down tools on instructions from that National Conference.

“And that a Council of Action be immediately

constituted to take such steps as may be necessary to carry the above decisions into effect."

Three days later the National Conference, consisting of 689 representatives of Trade Unions and 355 of local Labour Parties and Trades Councils, met and endorsed the formation of the Council of Action. The Council was instructed to remain in being until it had secured not only guarantees against any British participation in the war, but also the "recognition of the Russian Soviet Government and the establishment of unrestricted trading and commercial relationships between Great Britain and Russia." Local Councils of Action sprang up all over the country, and preparations were made for a general strike at a moment's notice. But no strike was necessary; for it was evident that in the face of this unanimity war was impossible. The Prime Minister, indeed, sneered at the whole move as being quite unnecessary; the Government had not contemplated going to war, and the fears of Labour were a mere illusion. But the general public certainly did not believe this, and on all the evidence they were right in not believing it. Many, who were uncomfortable about the theory of direct action, readily agreed that a great peril had been averted by the promptitude and solidarity of the Labour movement.

The Council of Action was, of course, met with a

chorus of indignation from the more conservative politicians and Press. It was denounced as subversive of democratic government and as open insurrection. That it was unconstitutional in a technical sense is undeniable. It was defended by the more moderate Labour leaders, who had hitherto been consistently opposed to direct action, on the ground that in the critical circumstances it was justified by sheer necessity. And it was argued with much force that Parliament had long been reduced by the Ministry to such a state of subservience and impotence that it was notoriously unrepresentative of the national will, and that the partisans of direct action were in fact upholding the spirit of the constitution in breaking its letter.

By the Left wing of Labour the Council was welcomed eagerly for what it promised in the future. The more optimistic saw in the machinery thus called into being the nucleus of a revolutionary organisation, which would be ready when the moment came for other and more far-reaching purposes. And in the new spirit which animated the movement they divined the happiest omens. But these hopes were pitched too high. The formation of the Council of Action effected its immediate purpose, which was to prevent war. On that organised Labour was unquestionably united, and had, indeed, the support of the majority of other classes in the

community. But when presently attempts were made to push the Council on to more positive activities in the way of forcing the Government to come to terms with the Soviets, the issue was no longer so clear and simple, and there was much less enthusiasm, if not less agreement. It is evident that in an emergency, where public opinion is profoundly moved, the threat of direct action may be relied on to succeed, and that to decry it as unconstitutional will wring very few withers.<sup>1</sup> But to count on the mobilisation of the Labour forces for offensive action on a large scale is, at present at any rate, premature. The machinery may be there (the Council of Action is, indeed, nominally still in existence), but machinery is nothing without the spirit behind it, and the spirit desired by direct actionists has not penetrated very deeply in the mass. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the events of August, 1920, were a very serious warning to the governing classes, and that

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the successful use of the general strike in Germany (against the 'Kapp' militarist counter-revolution in March, 1920) and in Denmark (in April, 1920, in protest against the King's dismissal of the Radical-Socialist Ministry, which had accepted the result of the plebiscite over the Flensburg area in favour of remaining German). On the other hand, there was a disastrous failure in France. The railwaymen on May 1st began a strike for nationalisation, which the G.G.T. "generalised," including demands for disarmament, the abandonment of colonial expeditions, the international sharing of war debts, etc. The miners, dockers, seamen, metal workers, building trades, Paris tram and bus services, and others, were called out. But the response was very partial, the Government took strong measures, and the strike was called off on May 21st.



they did immensely enhance the prestige of the theory of direct action. The Council of Action may have given rise to exaggerated hopes, but it has left its mark on the British Labour movement.

It would be outside the province of this book to discuss the great trade depression which overspread the country at the close of this year. Its roots are to be found in the effects of the long war, with its prodigious waste and exhaustion, the topsy-turvy state of finance, the enfeeblement of European trade in general, and the loss in particular of pre-war markets in Germany, Russia and Austria. The opening of 1921 saw unemployment rising rapidly in nearly every industry and short-time almost universal; while the Trade Unions, their funds heavily drained by the pressure of out-of-work pay, were engaged in a tussle with the Government over the remedies to be applied.

## CHAPTER X

### THE PROGRESS OF ORGANISATION

Growth of Membership since the War—The Progress of Amalgamation—Industrial Unionism—The Shop Stewards' Movement—The 'General Staff' of Labour—International Trade Union Organisations.

WE must now turn to a survey of the progress of Trade Unionism from another aspect, and attempt to estimate the present elements of strength and weakness in the movement and the problems of organisation and policy which confront it. The first striking feature, which has already been alluded to, is the growth in membership.<sup>1</sup> When the war broke out in 1914, the total number of Trade Unionists was in round figures four millions. At the time of the Armistice in November, 1918, it was 6½ millions, and at the beginning of 1920 it had risen to nearly 8,000,000. This increase has been general in all trades, but it has been most remarkable in agriculture, in general labour, among women and among the non-manual workers. The main

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix, p. 282.

cause everywhere has, no doubt, been the general impetus to organisation under the pressure of war-time conditions. A lesser, but still considerable, cause is to be found in the growth of the 'democratic spirit.' Many thousands, especially of the 'black-coated proletariat'—clerks, typists, technicians, foremen and minor officials of all sorts, have ceased to look on Trade Unionism as 'not respectable.' In some cases these 'brain-workers' have taken the step of allying themselves closely with the manual-workers; the Engineering and Shipbuilding Draughtsmen, for instance, are affiliated to the Trades Union Congress, and the South Wales Colliery Officials, including under-managers and clerks, to the Miners' Federation. Large strides in organisation have been made also by the 'professionals' outside industry proper, such as teachers, journalists and actors. The farm-workers had a special stimulus given to them by the Corn Production Act, 1917, and the establishment of the Agricultural Wages Boards, which, in fact, have had an effect very similar to that of the Trade Boards in the low-paid urban industries. A certain proportion of the female membership in most of the Unions was, of course, purely temporary, since many of the women only acted as munition-makers or transport-workers "for the duration of the war," and returned, when peace came, to their homes. Nevertheless

there was not during the year 1920 any large fall; for the gap left by those who thus dropped out was more than filled by the influx of new members in other occupations. Broadly speaking, even if Trade Unionism is still far from being universal, it is true to say that in all the important industries the old problem of the non-unionist has disappeared, though it must be admitted that many of the new recruits are decidedly lukewarm.

All this host is now grouped in between 1200 and 1300 separate Unions—‘separate’ at least on paper, for, as has been pointed out in a previous chapter, many of these bodies are closely linked in federations, and the bald statement that in coal-mining, for instance, there are ninety-six independent associations, obviously conveys a false impression to one who does not know the facts. Since the war there has been a marked progress of the movement for fusion. In 1920 there were thirteen amalgamations which covered no less than a million and three-quarter workers and eliminated thirty-one sectional Unions. The A. S. E., with nine other societies of metal workers,<sup>1</sup> has passed into the Amalgamated Engin-

<sup>1</sup> United Machine Workers; Amalgamated Smiths and Strikers; Steam Engine Makers; East of Scotland Brassfounders; Associated Brassfounders, Turners, Fitters, Finishers and Coppersmiths; Amalgamated Instrument Makers; North of England Brass Turners; London United Metal Turners; Amalgamated Tool Makers.

engineering Union, which claims a total membership of 460,000. Two Bricklayers' Societies have united with the Plasterers and the Stonemasons in the Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers, and the builders' labourers have also fused several separate organisations. Other notable amalgamations have taken place in the wood-working, printing, tailoring, distributive and transport industries. And still larger combinations are probable before long; at the beginning of 1921 proposals were under discussion for the amalgamation of sixteen transport Unions (including three Unions of shipping clerks), for a general combination of Ship Constructional and Engineering Workers, comprising all the skilled societies in the shipyards—Boilermakers, Shipwrights, Blacksmiths, Sheet Metal Workers and Wood Workers—and for the formation of a huge general labour Union comprising the National Union of General Workers, and the National Amalgamated Workers' Union, which is itself made up of the Workers' Union, the Municipal Employees' Association and the National Amalgamated Union of Labour.

Yet, despite all this advance, there remains a deplorable amount of disunity. Sectional aims and vested interests bulk large in most industries. The general labour Unions and the National Agricultural Labourers' Union are in open rivalry for the farm-workers. The Patternmakers and the Electrical

Trades Union refuse to join the A.E.U. The Amalgamated Society of Tailors holds aloof from the United Garment Workers,<sup>1</sup> the Locomotive Engineers and Firemen from the N.U.R. The problem of the women's organisations, again, is unsolved. In some cases the exclusionist policy has broken down, and women are freely admitted, either in a separate section or in mixed branches. But in other cases, particularly in the metal industry, the old spirit flourishes and membership of the skilled Unions is rigorously confined to males. This must not, of course, be put down to mere masculine prejudice; the men's objections are based on very justifiable fears of having their standards lowered by the introduction of cheap female labour. Nevertheless, without passing any censure, we must admit that the present position is one which cannot last and about which the Trade Union movement ought to bestir itself.<sup>2</sup>

It is obvious, again, that a good deal of this amalgamation only represents a massing of kindred crafts of skilled workmen. That is, of course, in itself a good thing, but it still leaves the craft basis

<sup>1</sup>The Garment Workers combined several clothing trade Unions in 1915. The Scottish Tailors joined in 1920.

<sup>2</sup>See *Women in Trade Unions*, by B. Drake, and *Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry* (especially Minority Report by Mrs. Sidney Webb) [Cd. 135, 1919] for a full discussion of this subject.

of organisation. The craft basis, natural and even necessary as it may have been in earlier days, is now, in view both of the organisation of the employers and of the aims of the modern Labour movement, quite unsuitable in industry as a whole. The most active thinkers in the Trade Unions, indeed, recognise this, and favour the establishment of a real industrial unionism. Industrial unionism, as has been pointed out in an earlier chapter, does not mean the ignoring of all differences of craft, of all the special interests of separate grades. Both the highly centralised N.U.R. and the looser federation of the Miners allow adequate representation to the interests of their diverse groups, and it is clear that theoretically, at any rate, no serious objection can be raised on this head to industrial unionism.

The substantial difficulty is not, however, theoretical but practical. It appears most clearly in such industries as engineering or shipbuilding, where there is a yawning gulf between the skilled mechanic and the unskilled or 'semi-skilled' labourer. If we could start with a clean slate to-day, it might be easy, as it has been in Russia, to set up a complete system of industrial Unions. The Soviet dictatorship has fitted the whole of its organised workers, amounting in 1920 to some four and a half millions, into twenty-three Unions on the simple basis of

“uniting all workers and employees of a given industry independently of the particular functions they perform.” The fundamental principle is “in one factory one union,” and this means that in an engineering works, for example, not only the unskilled and the skilled metal-workers, but wood-workers, clerks or any other category, are members of the Metal Workers’ organisation.<sup>1</sup>

But Britain is not Russia, and it is plainly impossible to find a short way, either by compulsion or by gentle persuasion, to alter the growth of two generations. The highly skilled metal-workers in this country have a tradition, an outlook and material standards, which have not only justified the popular view of them as ‘aristocrats’ of the labour world, but have bred in them some of the vices as well as the virtues of aristocracy. To the unskilled in the engineering industry the gulf between them and the skilled has seemed unbridgeable, and they have been forced to organise themselves in their own way. There is, of course, a large section among the skilled metal-workers, as well as in shipbuilding and other trades, eager to transform their Unions from a craft to an industrial basis, and in time the change will doubtless be accomplished. At the moment, however, it appears

<sup>1</sup> See *Trade Unions in Soviet Russia* (Labour Research Department and I.L.P. Information Committee).



remote, and it becomes harder, and not easier, to accomplish with the rapidly growing strength of the general labour Unions. For, as their membership and power increase, their independence and confidence also increase, and the old antagonism tends to harden. The probable, and perhaps the most hopeful, line of development is that suggested by Mr. Cole<sup>1</sup>—that is to say, both sides will consolidate on their own lines, the skilled men uniting more and more closely as metal-workers, and the unskilled extending their combination with general labour in diverse industries on the 'One Big Union' principle, while the policy and action of the two forces is harmonised through the Shop Stewards' movement.

The Shop Stewards' movement is from several points of view one of the most significant of the new developments in the Trade Union world. It represents in its newer form a revolt of the 'rank and file' against officialdom, of democracy against bureaucracy. It stands for a new theory of industrial organisation, and upon it there has been elaborated by the 'militants' a complete scheme of proletarian revolution. With the larger political aspect we cannot deal here; we are concerned only with its specifically Trade Union side.

The institution of the Shop Steward is not new. Long before the war it was the practice of certain

<sup>1</sup> See *Chaos and Order in Industry*, by G. D. H. Cole, ch. viii.

Unions to appoint one of their members in a workshop for the purpose mainly of seeing that all contributions were duly paid, and that newcomers were organised. But these minor officials, generally speaking, played an unimportant part. In the peculiar conditions of the war, however, when workshop problems, especially in the engineering industry, became more urgent, and at the same time more difficult for the Trade Union officials outside to deal with, the Shop Stewards' functions inevitably extended, often to the conduct of negotiations on a large scale. Meantime, side by side with these regular officials, there emerged in many of the factories a set of 'unofficial' stewards, appointed without central sanction by the rank and file. This movement was generally in avowed opposition to, and in some important centres literally substituted itself for, the orthodox machinery of the Unions. This was notably the case on the Clyde, to which reference has already been made. There, under the leadership of revolutionary theorists, the Shop Stewards' Committees developed into a Strike Committee (in February 1915), and the Strike Committee in its turn into a more permanent organisation, the Clyde Workers' Committee. This movement mixed up the official Shop Stewards with the unofficial; but so far as the Unions were concerned, it was, of course, unconstitutional. Before long it was

imitated elsewhere, and Shop Stewards' and Works' Committees sprang up all over the country.

It would be a mistake to regard the movement as everywhere inspired by a deliberate antagonism to the established Unions. But, it clearly was in its essence a challenge to the existing basis of organisation, and it was, and is, definitely proclaimed as such by its aggressive leaders. It is at once the demand for greater autonomy for the rank and file workers as against the control of the central official, and for more effective organisation against the power of the employer. Both those demands (which, indeed, are not easily separated, for the second may depend largely on the first) will be satisfied, it is argued, and will only be satisfied, by substituting the workshop for the geographical Branch as the real unit of Trade Unionism. In every workshop there should be a Workshop Committee composed of Shop Stewards elected by each of the sections of workers in the shop (*e.g.* members of the A.E.U., members of each general labour Union, women workers, and so on). Delegates of the various Workshop Committees would unite into a Works or Plant Committee, and above this would come Local Workers' Committees, representing the different works in a district, and a National Industrial Committee representing all the districts. Such is the conception outlined by Mr. J. T. Murphy,

one of the apostles of the movement.<sup>1</sup> As a complete scheme it raises various difficulties which cannot be discussed here, and it has not won any such acceptance as to cause uneasiness to the orthodox. But its fundamental principle, the importance of workshop organisation, has won a widespread acceptance. It has, in fact, been recognised to some extent in the constitution of the newly-formed Amalgamated Engineering Union, which gives the Shop Stewards larger powers in the workshop as well as direct representation on the District Committee of the Union (1 Shop Steward for every 10,000 members or part thereof).<sup>2</sup> And earlier than this the principal Trade Unions had made an agreement with the Engineering Employers' Federation providing for the recognition of Shop Stewards and Works Committees in negotiations on workshop questions.

<sup>1</sup> See *The Workers' Committee*, by J. T. Murphy (Sheffield Workers' Committee, 2d.); cf. *An Introduction to Trade Unionism*, by G. D. H. Cole; and *Trade Unionism: A New Model*, by R. I. Arnot (I.L.P., 2d.).

<sup>2</sup> Unofficial organisations of Shop Stewards also still exist. Some of the Left wing members of the movement prefer to be outside the control of the official Trade Union.

\* [The new constitution of the A.E.U. is still more elaborate than that of the A.S.E. described above (see pp. 50-52). Certain features still remain—the District Committees, the full-time Executive Council (now enlarged to 9), the District Organising Delegates (now 26), and the final Appeal Court (now 15 members from equal electoral districts). But the Delegate Meeting has disappeared, and there are new bodies in the shape of 26 Divisional Committees (delegates from grouped Districts), a

The Shop Stewards' movement, although it has bulked large only in engineering, has made its appearance in other industries—wood-working, boot and shoe and textile, and it is plainly capable of a far wider extension, without putting itself in antagonism to the established Unions. It is also clear that such an extension must be favoured by those who aim at industrial unionism. It is, in fact, an indirect method of approach to the ideal, helping powerfully as it does to break down the craft and sectional divisions by the common interest and common action of the workshop.

So much, then, for the progress that has been made in 'strengthening the body and the limbs of the Trade Union movement. The other great weakness—the weakness in the head—which has long been a reproach to it, has at last been treated in earnest. The lack of effective direction or central co-ordination was brought into peculiar prominence by the railway strike of 1919. Immediately after the settlement, a special Committee of Trade Union representatives was appointed to draw up a report

National Committee (2 representatives from each Divisional Committee, who alone may vote), and the E.C. and Organising District Delegates. The National Committee, which meets at least once a year, and also when called together by the E.C., has large powers. Finally, a National Conference, consisting of all the members of all the Divisional Committees, may be summoned, if necessary, to get a decision on any question of vital importance.]

on possible schemes' for a 'General Staff.' Plans were submitted, discussions and conferences were held, and eventually in September, 1920, the Trades Union Congress by a large majority adopted a drastic reform. In place of the old Parliamentary Committee of the Congress, there is to be a General Council of thirty-two members. These members will be elected by eighteen different groups of industries. Two must be women, representing those Unions having women members. The Council's functions are, first, to keep watch over all industrial movements and to co-ordinate action, and secondly, to promote common action by the Trade Union movement, not only on wages and hours, but on any question which may arise between Trade Unions and employers or between Trade Unions and the Government. The Council is empowered to assist any Union which is attacked on any matter of vital principle, to carry on Trade Union propaganda and to promote solidarity with foreign Labour movements. It is charged also, in conjunction with the Labour Party and the Co-operators, to set up departments for research, legal advice and publicity.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Relations between the Trade Unions and the Co-operative movement are, outwardly at least, very much as they were before the war. The position of the Co-operative Employees is still unsatisfactory. Though strengthened by their amalgamation with the Warehouse Workers, they are in constant conflict with their

There does now exist, therefore, what ought to have existed a generation ago, a central body endowed with real functions. It exists on paper. How effective it will be, remains to be seen. It is obvious that its vitality will depend largely on the outlook and the energy of its personnel. It will depend even more on the spirit of the whole movement. For this General Staff of Labour is not the General Staff of a national army clothed with autocratic powers; it is appointed by the battalions below and must necessarily be responsive to their sentiments. The task of making order out of chaos, unity out of disorganisation, though it may be helped or thwarted by the 'Staff,' must fall in the main on the Trade Unions themselves.

Finally, mention must be made of the international organisation of Trade Unionism,<sup>1</sup> in which many employers, the Co-operative Societies. Nor is there any substantial and permanent unity of policy or action between the Co-operative movement and the Trade Unions as a whole. Nevertheless, there is a generally amicable spirit, and often at critical moments valuable practical assistance is afforded by the Co-operators (cf. the case of the 1919 railway strike). On the political side the Co-operative movement has advanced. It put forward ten candidates of its own at the General Election of 1918, one of whom was successful and has since sat and worked with the Labour Party. The Co-operators are still discussing the question of a complete political alliance with the Labour Party. In the field of propaganda and education there is a certain amount of unity between the Co-operative and the other wings.

<sup>1</sup> For the official International Labour Organisation under the League of Nations, which is not discussed here, see *Labour as an International Problem* (Macmillan, 1920).

of the British Unions have a part. There are two lines of organisation. One is the International Federation of Trade Unions, embracing all industries; the other consists of international groupings by industry, known usually as the International Trade Union Secretariats. Of these latter there are now thirty-two. Their activity before the war was slight, being confined generally to the holding of conferences and the publication of statistics, though occasionally financial assistance might be given in strikes or attempts made to prevent the importation of black-legs. The miners had a common international programme, including a minimum wage, an eight-hour day and nationalisation. Since the war there are signs of a greater interest and a more forward spirit. A number of resolutions have been passed in favour of socialisation and of concerted international action against war.

The International Federation of Trade Unions, which was founded in 1901, was likewise of small importance before the war. It did little beyond circulating reports and bringing together every two years a number of Trade Union officials of different countries. In 1919 it was reorganised and furnished with a constitution, officers and a Committee, while its scope was enlarged to cover "the promotion of combined action on all questions of mutual Trade Unionism." This rejuvenated body has manifested



a good deal of liveliness in conference and in various resolutions on the economic, political or military scandals of Europe. But it would be absurd to pretend that it represents as yet any serious power or even any deep-seated common feeling, and it may be that, with its 'semi-political' character, it will continue to be ineffective. It is for the moment, in any case, peculiarly weakened by defections both on the Right and the Left. The American Trade Unions will have nothing to do with it, because they regard its general tone as too revolutionary, the Russians because they regard it as not revolutionary enough.

Nevertheless, slight as the international organisation of Trade Unionists may be, it would be a mistake to dismiss it as of no importance. The 'internationalism' of Labour has grown rapidly in the last few years. 'Sympathetic' action on a larger scale in industrial disputes is by no means improbable in the future. And it may well be that concerted action, or the threat of it, by the Trade Unions will finally prove more effective than either the rival Socialist Internationals or the League of Nations in averting another great war.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE GOAL OF TRADE UNIONISM

The New Spirit—Demand for the Control of Industry—  
Whitley Councils—Syndicalism, Collectivism and Guild  
Socialism—The Miners' Scheme, Building Guilds, etc.—  
“Workers' Control” in Foreign Countries—The Problem  
of Method : Revolution and the Alternatives.

IF some Rip van Winkle had fallen asleep in the middle of the Trade Union movement at the beginning of this century, and waked up to-day, he would find more to surprise him than the material development in membership and organisation, which we have described. He would find a striking spiritual change, a new mentality, a new policy, new influences at work. This had begun in the years before the war. During the war it was developing steadily, though but little noticed ; now it is seen plainly as a fact of tremendous importance to our whole social structure. The industrial struggle is still largely the old rough and tumble—a babel of day to day quarrels over wages and jobs. But it is not necessary to look far below the surface to see that it is also

something more than that. It is becoming actually, what it formerly was only in theory, a struggle for the mastery of industry. The workmen no longer ask merely for a better distribution of the surplus, a higher standard of comfort; they are making a bid for freedom, or, which is the same thing, for power. This demand for industrial democracy is at its mildest a request for "a share in the management." In its extremest form it means the abolition of capitalism and the substitution of the working class as the masters of production in place of the bourgeoisie. Of differences of policy and method in the pushing of these demands we shall say more presently; but it is desirable first to see what answer capitalism makes to the challenge.

Now it has become evident that the capitalist organisation of industry is by no means so efficient as its defenders have always assumed. Its difficulties in providing the goods and services the world requires are great, and they are increased by the reluctance of Labour to settle down patiently into the old pre-war routine. The first problem, therefore, that presents itself in the new epoch is how to conciliate the workman and stimulate him to intenser efforts. Certain easy-sounding solutions have, of course, been tried without much success. Employers have striven to extend the system of payment by results. Elaborate bonus and efficiency systems have

been introduced. Scientific management has been preached eagerly, and practised here and there. Profit-sharing has been held out as a bait, and in its more developed form of co-partnership even as a splendid ideal. But, broadly speaking, all these efforts have been met by the Trade Unions either with hostility or indifference.

Besides manipulations of the wage-system, however, designed to satisfy the claim for more pay, there have been some attempts to meet the claim for a share in the control of industry. Of these the most notable is the Whitley Councils Scheme.

The objects of the Whitley Committee were "(1) to make and consider suggestions for securing a permanent improvement in the relations between employers and workmen, and (2) to recommend means for securing that industrial conditions affecting the relations between employers and workmen shall be systematically reviewed by those concerned, with a view to improving conditions in the future."<sup>1</sup> Great hopes were based on the recommendations put forward. An elaborate machinery has been set up in a number of industries, consisting of National Joint Industrial Councils (popularly known as Whitley Councils) with an equal number of

<sup>1</sup> See *Reports on Joint Standing Industrial Councils* (Cd. 8606 and 9002, 1d. each) and *Industrial Reports*, Nos. 1 to 4, issued by the Ministry of Labour (1d. each).

representatives of Employers' Associations and Trade Unions, and District Councils and Works' Committees. These bodies can, and do, deal with a variety of matters—wages and bonus, disputes, apprenticeship, welfare, research, trade organisation. But their formation is voluntary, and by the end of 1920 the total number of Joint Industrial Councils in existence was only about seventy. Most of them are in the smaller or weakly organised trades (*e.g.* Bobbins and Shuttles; Elastic Webbing; Metallic Bedsteads; Needles, Fish-hooks and Fishing Tackle),<sup>1</sup> which are precisely what they were not meant for; Trade Boards, in fact, were recommended for these, and Councils for the well-organised. But the bigger and well-organised industries in general did not want them; where Conciliation Boards and the like already existed, this new piece of machinery seemed merely superfluous. In some of the weaker trades the Whitley Councils have been used, as many predicted they would be used, for anti-social purposes. They have, in fact, afforded the opportunity to employers and workmen of joining hands to exploit the public, by the keeping up of prices, for example, or by endeavouring to get protective tariffs imposed. In some cases quarrels over wage-demands have led to deadlocks and reduced the organisation to futility.

<sup>1</sup> A few of the more important industries have Whitley Councils—*e.g.* Printing, Boot and Shoe, Tramways.

On the other hand, they have no doubt produced in certain industries an improvement in organisation. The pottery trade is a case in point. It is claimed, too, that some of the Whitley Councils have resulted in standardising rates of wages over the country, and in improving the machinery for the settlement of disputes, so that fewer strikes are caused by trifling differences. And, lastly, they have been the means of giving a number of Trade Unionists some practice in administration and a greater knowledge of their industry. But of that sort of control which will really satisfy the Trade Unions they give but the shadow. The whole scheme has, indeed, been strongly opposed by more than one important Union, on the ground either of its uselessness or of its actual disadvantage to Labour by creating an 'unholy alliance' with Capital,<sup>1</sup> while it is roundly denounced by Left wing organisations like the Shop Stewards. There is certainly no one so optimistic now as to expect it to establish permanent harmony between employers and employed.

<sup>1</sup> This objection does not apply, of course, to the Whitley Councils in the Civil Service.

\* It should be noted also that the Joint Industrial Council in the Building Industry (the "Builders' Parliament," as it is sometimes called) is in an exceptional position. It was set up before the Whitley Scheme, mainly through the efforts of Mr. Malcolm Sparkes, a young employer, acting in co-operation with the Trade Unions. It does not deal with wages or disputes. See *The Industrial Council for the Building Industry* (Garton Foundation).

What, then, is the control for which Labour is contending? The answer cannot be given in two words; for as soon as we pass beyond abstract phrases like 'self-government in industry,' we find disagreement among different schools of thought. Let us begin, therefore, by seeing how the main theories which have influenced the Trade Union movement approach the question. All those theories start, of course, on common ground; they all aim at the destruction of the capitalist system. It is clear that British Trade Unionism long ago passed the stage where it could be looked upon merely as a shield, a defensive organisation for the workman against the power of the employer. Early in this century, with the rise of the Labour Party, the Trade Unions were an integral part of the aggressive movement of Socialism. Essential as they were, however, they were by no means regarded as all-important by the generality of State Socialists. Many, indeed, if asked what would be the position of the Trade Unions in the Society of the future, were ready to answer that with the overthrow of capitalism they would have done their work, and there would be no further need of them. Against this view and its practical corollary—the tendency to subordinate the Trade Unionist to the politician—there set in a reaction, as we have seen, a few years before the war, in the shape of revolutionary Industrial Unionism and

Syndicalism. The Syndicalist's view of the Trade Unions' place in the future Society was very different from that of the State Socialist. It was that the Trade Unions—duly developed of course—would dominate Society. The whole business of wealth-production and distribution, and much else besides, would be in their hands and no one else's.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The reader should bear the following points in mind in this chapter:—(1) Syndicalism, as preached in this country before the war, was derived partly from France and partly from the Industrial Unionism of the U.S.A. Syndicalism proper, as evolved by the French, and the American Industrial Unionism are not precisely the same thing, but they are near enough in essentials to justify us in coupling them here under the one name. In the discussion in the text, therefore, Syndicalism means any theory of revolutionary Trade Unionism whose aim is to establish corporations of producers, uncontrolled by the State or any recognised consumers' body.

(2) Syndicalism in this sense is not now a potent force. It practically disappeared in France when the C.G.T. adopted the new programme described below. In this country and elsewhere it has been superseded by Guild Socialism or by Marxian Industrial Unionism, Communism or Bolshevism, etc. I have devoted some little space to it, partly because of its historical significance and partly because of the confused notions which still prevail about it.

(3) To discuss adequately the tenets of the various groups of Industrial Unionists, Communists, etc., would take too long. Some of them are decidedly vague directly they go beyond the "organisation of the Revolution." Where they are clear, however, they are generally on the side of the Guild Socialists (some Communists, indeed, are professed Guild Socialists) in allowing rights and functions to the citizens or consumers as against the producers' bodies. (See, e.g., *The Bolshevik Theory*, by R. W. Postgate.) Many criticise the Russian Bolsheviks for putting too great a control on the Trade Unions, and reducing them in effect to organs of the State, as well as for the reintroduction of autocracy in the workshop.



The Syndicalist doctrine, uncompromisingly and rather vaguely set forth as it was in France, and even more vaguely by its votaries in this country, laid itself open to a heavy fire of criticism. Its anti-parliamentarism, its reliance on the general strike—whether advocated seriously as a practical method or treated as a ‘social myth’ to enthuse the working class—and its exaltation of sabotage, were all hotly disputed.

But more important for our present purpose than its methods is its goal, which is, put shortly, a community based exclusively on associations of producers, each freely controlling its own industry, without any interference either from that engine of oppression, the State, or from any organisation of consumers as such. Now the Syndicalist society, if it is to work without any share of control being allowed to the consumers, really implies an Anarchist Utopia, in which all difficulties are disposed of by simply assuming a régime of perfect brotherhood. This, in effect, is pretty much the assumption that we find in the writings of some of the French apostles of the gospel.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, it is easy to see the danger of a society dominated by a number of

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<sup>1</sup> See *Comment nous ferons la Révolution*, by E. Pataud and E. Pouget (Tallandier, Paris). This is a book throughout which, said Prince Kropotkin, “can be felt the life-giving breath of Anarchism.”

powerful and irresponsible corporations, able and eager to exploit the public. That, indeed, is how Syndicalism has been conceived by most of its opponents. But it is naturally not admitted by the Syndicalists themselves; they have, in fact, insisted that the consumers would be adequately protected through an elaborate machinery of local and central Councils or Boards. On these Boards representatives of all industries would have a place, and each industry would find any improper claim on its part met by a powerful opposition, since all the rest would be consumers as against it. Few, however, are convinced by this argument, and the Syndicalist philosophy has never won any general acceptance, precisely because it has proposed no reasonable representation of the consumers, and has not properly considered the needs and rights and organisation of the citizens as citizens, outside their purely professional or industrial functions.

Nevertheless, the Syndicalist movement, historically considered, has played an important rôle. Apart from its undoubted influence in helping to bring political action into disfavour, which may be regarded as a minor and temporary effect, it must be given credit for something more fundamental and lasting. The essence of its doctrine is the right of the worker to control the conditions of his work. This claim of the producer is not, of course, a new one; it has

always been admitted by Socialists;<sup>1</sup> but it had been till within the last decade entirely overshadowed by the insistence upon the rights and interests of the consumer on the one hand, and upon the importance of efficiency in wealth-production on the other. The orthodox "Social Democracy" of the beginning of this century, in fact, put a good deal more emphasis on the "social" than on the "democracy," at any rate so far as industry was concerned. The coal-miner or the cotton-spinner would have exchanged the service of the autocratic capitalist or limited liability company for that of a bureaucratic State. He would still be a "wage-slave" with little, if any, more voice in deciding his own conditions.

While, therefore, Syndicalism, championing the claims of the producer, but pushing them too far, and Collectivism, insisting on the rights of the consumer, but pushing them too far, stood confronting one another, there came into the field a new theory, destined soon to exercise a deeper influence. This was Guild Socialism.<sup>2</sup> The Guild Socialists

<sup>1</sup> Mr. and Mrs. Webb stressed the point many years ago in their *Industrial Democracy* and again in *Problems of Modern Industry*.

<sup>2</sup> Guild Socialism was not definitely connected in its origin with Syndicalism. It had appeared independently before the Syndicalist theories became fashionable in this country. Its birth may perhaps be put in 1906, when Mr. A. J. Pentty's book *The Restoration of the Guild System* was published. The Guild principles were in the

saw the weak and the strong points both of Syndicalism and Collectivism, and offered a new basis on which the claims of producers and consumers to a share in the control of industry might be reconciled. It is not the business of this book to discuss in detail the Guild theories, covering, as they do, not merely industrial structure, but the whole organisation of the community. We must confine ourselves to their bearing on industry and the development of Trade Unionism.

The Guild Socialist ideal is the organisation of each industry or public service as a self-governing association of all those engaged in it, whether as manual-workers or brain-workers, skilled or unskilled. This does not mean, of course, that every Guild would be organised on a uniform pattern. Many details must naturally depend on the nature of the industry; mining and railways, building and agriculture, obviously could not all be cast in precisely the same mould. But the fundamental

course of the next few years elaborated in the *New Age* by Mr. A. R. Orage and others. The Guild Socialist literature is now voluminous, and reveals differences of opinion among the Guildsmen in many important details, if not on fundamentals. For the student of Trade Unionism the most important books are *Self-Government in Industry*, *Guild Socialism Re-stated*, *Chaos and Order in Industry*—all by G. D. H. Cole; *The Meaning of National Guilds*, by M. B. Reckitt and C. E. Bechhofer; *The Acquisitive Society*, by R. H. Tawney; *National Guilds and the State*, by S. G. Hobson. For other books see Bibliography.

principles would be the same. • Every Guild, so far as its internal affairs were concerned, would be a democracy—that is to say, it would aim at securing to all its individual members and grades or crafts the maximum of self-determination. As regards its external relations, whilst exercising complete autonomy in all its working conditions and the processes of production, it would not own the industry—mines, railways, factories or what not. The ownership would belong to the community, and further, the community, whether represented through the State or the Municipality, or another form of association, such as the Co-operative Society,<sup>1</sup> would exercise a control in the matter of quality, quantity and price of the goods or services supplied by the Guild.

What part does the Trade Union play in this structure? The answer is that the Trade Union is the embryo of the Guild. The complete Guild would

<sup>1</sup> The Co-operative consumers' associations must undoubtedly play a very important part in the democratic society of the future. The Co-operative movement of to-day, with its vast network of Stores, its great Wholesale Departments, its millions of members and its hundreds of millions of turnover, is, in Great Britain and on the Continent of Europe alike, not only a powerful force, but a genuine popular growth [cf. *Co-operation at Home and Abroad*, by C. R. Fay (King, 1920)]. For many purposes it offers the ideal form for the representation of consumers in their relations with the organised bodies of producers. But it does not seem possible for it to extend its activities, as some enthusiasts imagine, over the whole industry of the nation, and by itself to supplant capitalism. (See *Co-operation and the Future of Industry*, by L. S. Woolf.)

be the Trade Union developed in two main ways. First, it would, as we have said, include all those in the industry from the most expert technician to the least-skilled labourer, from the manager to the typist. Secondly, its function would be transformed; the Trade Union to-day is occupied in fighting for the interests of its members, the Guild's task would be to carry on the whole business of production. All that clearly implies not the destruction or diminution of the Trade Union, but its enlargement and its development into a 'profession,' with a broader scope and higher standards.

The theory has naturally met with criticism. Some of its more ignorant or more malicious opponents refuse to distinguish it from Syndicalism.<sup>1</sup> Others, while avoiding this misrepresentation, still fear that the autonomy claimed for the Guild involves a danger to the community. There would not be sufficient stimulus, it is urged, to efficient service on the part of the Guild members; there

<sup>1</sup> E.g., Professor Ramsay Muir in *Liberalism and Industry* (Constable, 1920) calls Guild Socialism "kid-glove Syndicalism." This seems to be about as sensible as it would be to call democracy "kid-glove aristocracy," or Liberalism, whose cause Professor Muir is arguing, "kid-glove Conservatism." But presently he even drops the "kid gloves," and says roundly (p. 195) that the proposal of "Syndicalism or Guild Socialism is that every industry should be brought under the direct ownership and control of the workers in the industry, with whom even the State should have no power to interfere."

would be an inevitable tendency to conservatism, a resistance to new developments, to changes of process and so on. Yet again, it is said, the internal democracy of the Guild would end in disaster. If the workers are to elect their own foremen, discipline will break down, as it has constantly broken down in the self-governing workshops that have been set up in the past.<sup>1</sup>

These are all points of substance to which an answer is clearly required. Answers will, in fact, be found in the Guild Socialist writings. Here only a word or two need be said. So far as motive is concerned, the Guildsmen, like all other Socialists, look for an increased zeal in the service of the community, when it is for the community, and not primarily for private profits, that men are working. But more than that, they rely on a further motive, which is wanting in a bare system of State Socialism — the professional pride or honour, the sense or responsibility which should spring from corporate freedom.<sup>2</sup> These things may seem of small promise to a sceptical age which has seen industry carried on mainly under the stimulus of fear and hunger. But this same sceptical age can

<sup>1</sup>See *Guild Socialism*, by G. C. Field (Wells Gardner, 1920). Cf. also *A Constitution for the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain*, by Sidney and Beatrice Webb (Longmans, 1920), especially chap. vi. ("The Reorganisation of the Vocational World").

<sup>2</sup>See on this point *The Acquisitive Society*, by R. H. Tawney.

also see very plainly that men are less and less willing to respond to that stimulus; the capitalist machine is creaking very ominously, and new methods will have to be tried. Arguments based on the proved selfishness of particular crafts under present conditions, or on the narrow conservatism of the ancient or the mediæval Guilds, are by no means conclusive about the wider organisation that Guild Socialism envisages in the future. Nevertheless, it is legitimate to want a more definite safeguard; and such a safeguard clearly lies in the power that the community will always have to increase its share of control, if what it has should prove inadequate. As for the fear that efficiency will be killed by too much democracy in the workshop, that too may be dispelled by the development of higher professional standards in the future. For the present, however, it must be admitted that this democratic control could only be very carefully and gradually introduced. It must be admitted also, in fairness to the Guild Socialists, that their proposals are in any case not so crude as is often represented; it is not suggested that every group of workers should be at liberty to elect a foreman or manager in the morning and dismiss him out of hand in the evening.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See on this point *Guild Socialism Re-stated*, by G. D. H. Cole, pp. 51 foll. And cf. the constitution of the Guild of Builders (London), which makes the Guild Manager responsible, through



But it is certain that the demand for 'freedom in the workshop' is one to which the largest possible concession will have to be made, if industrial democracy is to be anything more than a pretence.

It is not, however, the detailed elaborations of Guild Socialism, interesting as those may be, that make its importance. Some of them, indeed, may seem Utopian; on many of them there will be legitimate dispute. The Guild Socialists do not ask for the acceptance of a cut-and-dried system or the recital of an Athanasian creed. The practical importance of Guild Socialism lies in the inspiration given by its general principles. It is no exaggeration to say that these principles—the insistence on genuine democracy for the producers, side by side with a fair representation of the interests of the community and the 'professionalising' of the Unions—have been the most constructive and the most pervasive influence of the last decade. This does not mean that the Guild Socialists can, or wish to, claim exclusive credit for the change of thought and the shaping of policy in the Labour movement. But they have unquestionably had a large effect on the Collectivist philosophy; they have brought to bear the most

the Guild Committee, not merely to his own staff, but to the whole of the organised Building 'Trades' Operatives in the District. Similarly in the Manchester Building Guild the Committee appoints all departmental foremen.

damaging criticism both on the present industrial system and the Syndicalist remedy; they have given definiteness to vague aspirations in the Trade Unions. This again, of course, does not mean that millions of Trade Unionists have been 'converted' to Guild Socialism. Millions of them, indeed, certainly understand little or nothing of it, and some, who do understand it, reject it. But this is obviously a state of things by no means peculiar to the Labour movement. Every principle, or set of principles, in a modern society, from Divorce Law reform to bloody revolution, is understood and applied by an active minority, and acquiesced in, with a greater or less degree of intelligence, by a majority. The strength of an idea is not to be measured solely by counting the number of individuals who profess a formal adherence to it. So much only it is necessary to say in order to warn the reader against basing false assumptions on the facile statement, often made about Guild Socialism, that it is simply the idea of a few theorists quite remote from the mass.

How far the principles of the 'theorists' have in fact penetrated, may be seen in such instances in this country as the Miners' Federation scheme for the socialisation of the coal industry, the programme of the railwaymen, or the remarkable experiments in the building trade, as well as in similar movements on the Continent and in the United States.

The miners' scheme, as set out in the Nationalisation of Mines and Minerals Bill, 1919, does not create a fully-fledged Guild, but it is a definite step towards it. Its essence is ownership by the State and management by the industry itself. This management would be exercised by a National Mining Council, presided over by a Minister of Mines, responsible to Parliament, with District and Pit Councils functioning below it. On each of the first two bodies half the members would be chosen by the workers (*i.e.* by the Miners' Federation); while the actual workers in and about the mine would elect the Pit Councils. The other half would be appointed by the State in the case of the National Council, and by the National Council in the case of the District Councils. In addition there would be a Fuel Consumers' Council appointed by the State, with advisory powers to represent specifically the consumers' interests. There are certain obscure or weak points about this scheme. It is not quite evident, for instance, what sort of persons the State-appointed representatives on the National Council are to be. It is understood by some that they would be experts and technicians in the mining industry. Others talk of them as 'representatives of the public.' Probably we may assume that, if the plan were put into operation, they would be mixed. Objection is made, again, that

the consumers are not adequately represented by a Council which has only consultative functions. But, in point of fact, the consumers are represented in this case by Parliament, to which the industry is responsible through the Minister, and which has the final word in finance generally and coal prices in particular. The whole scheme is, of course, a matter for close argument, which we cannot attempt here. What we are calling special attention to is its main features—the elimination of the capitalist entrepreneur, the partnership of the community and the industry, organised on a self-governing basis, the attempt to bring the manual-workers and the brain-workers together in the business of control, the ‘workshop democracy’ in the Pit Councils.<sup>1</sup>

The Building Guilds formed in 1920, first in Manchester and later in London and elsewhere, are a different approach to the same goal. Here the Trade Unions, inspired by Mr. S. G. Hobson and Mr. Malcolm Sparkes, have themselves put their

<sup>1</sup> See *Nationalisation of the Mines*, by Frank Hodges, and *Further Facts from the Coal Commission*, by R. Page Arnot. For the question of democratic control of the railways, see *The Case for Nationalisation*, by A. Emil Davies, pp. 267 foll., and *Chaos and Order in Industry*, by G. D. H. Cole, ch. vi. (A discussion will be found here not only of the demand for control on the British railways, but also of the similar demand in America, known as the ‘Plumb Plan.’)

principles into action. The conditions of the building trade, of course, are such that no question of participation by the central State arises, and since the function of the builders is to contract to do a job, the public looks after its own interest automatically by the fact that it is, through the municipality, the other party to the contract, free to arrange its own terms with the self-governing Guild.<sup>1</sup> The Building Guilds are at present only isolated encroachments on the capitalistically organised industry, and they will have not merely to prove their capacity to achieve the work they have undertaken, but to fight the opposition of employers and the prejudices of the bureaucracy, before they can grow into a comprehensive national organisation. One obvious defect in their composition is that they have not yet succeeded in uniting the brain-workers with the manual-workers. A few technicians, architects and surveyors are included in the London Guilds, but in the main they have held aloof, so that the Guilds are really associations of Trade Unionist workmen, undertaking jobs by and for themselves. There is no reason, however, why this should persist, if the Guilds give evidence

<sup>1</sup> The Ministry of Health exercises certain supervisory powers over the Local Authorities in the matter of housing. The recent policy of the Ministry has been much and rightly criticised. So far as the Building Guilds are concerned, its action has been discouraging.

presently of making good. One further point is worthy of remark. The Building Guilds have been able to enlist the support of the Co-operative movement, both for the supply of materials and for the giving of financial guarantees for the performance of their contracts. This is not only an immediate practical advantage to the Guilds, but it indicates the value which a closer and more active association between these two great wings of the Labour movement may have over a larger field in the future.

There is no space here to discuss all the developments which have taken place in the foreign Trade Unions;<sup>1</sup> but it is important to notice the growth in practically every country of this same demand for 'workers' control' which we have been examining at home. In Germany the conditions after the war, and particularly the sudden attainment of power by the Socialists, naturally raised hopes of a large advance in this direction. The plans for the 'socialisation' of a number of industries have not, indeed, made much progress as yet; the hold of capitalism is still formidable throughout central Europe. But the new German Constitution formally establishes Works' Councils, District Workers' Councils and a National Workers' Council, all independent of the employers. These, however, are only for the protection of the 'social and economic interests' of the

<sup>1</sup> See *The Labour International Handbook* (1921).

workmen; for the execution of their 'economic functions' these bodies must combine with representatives of employers and other professional groups on District Economic Councils and a National Economic Council. The National Economic Council has the right to initiate social and industrial legislation, and all important bills on social and industrial questions must be submitted for its consideration before being introduced. This system is, in theory at any rate, something more than "Whitleyism," and something less than nationalisation or industrial democracy. It is, indeed, an alternative to nationalisation, on a sort of co-partnership basis. It is open to grave objections—the National Coal Syndicate set up in 1919, for instance, was soon seen to be a combination of Capital and Labour at the public expense—and it must not be supposed that it represents the ideal of the German Trade Unions, whether of the constitutional majority or the revolutionary minority. But it does obviously, whether it is good or bad, give the workmen a position which seven years ago would have seemed Utopian.

In Italy a year and a half of violent struggle culminated in the summer of 1920 in the seizure of a number of factories in the Northern towns by the metal-workers. Eventually, after the intervention of the General Confederation of Labour and

the Socialist Party, a settlement was made, by which the Government conceded the principle of a share in administration and financial and disciplinary control by the workers. Early in 1921 legislation was introduced for the setting up of Workers' Committees in each factory and also of central Committees comprising employers and workers. The Workers' Committees are given powers of seeing to the execution of all Labour laws, the right to call for the production of books and documents, and a voice in administration and discipline. It is too early as yet to pass any considered judgment; but the significance of the movement cannot be overlooked.

Finally, there has been a surprising change in France. The *Confédération Générale du Travail* in 1919 abandoned its narrow Syndicalist basis for a broader programme, which on essential points brings it into line with the general tendency in other countries. The French Trade Unions have founded, in conjunction with the co-operators and the technicians or brain-workers, an Economic Labour Council with a view of fitting themselves for the ultimate taking over of control of industries and social services in a 'partnership of producers and consumers.' This Council consists of three members of the C.G.T., three of the technicians' organisation (Union of Technical Workers in Industry, Commerce and Agriculture),



three of the National Federation of Co-operative Societies, and three of the National Federation of Public Employees. It has set up nine sections to deal with (1) transport and power, (2) national economy, (3) industrial production and raw materials, (4) agriculture, (5) finance and credit, (6) social administration, (7) general and technical education, (8) commerce and distribution, (9) the devastated regions of France. On the reports of those sections the Council will elaborate its programme and work out methods of realisation.

So far as any practical achievements are concerned, however, the French Trade Unions lag hopelessly in the rear. The *Confédération* itself, after a long process, has been declared an illegal association and ordered to dissolve,<sup>1</sup> whilst it is internally weakened by the fact that a large and active minority adheres to Moscow and the full programme of Communism.

Let us now return to our question, what it is for which Labour is contending, and attempt a summary answer. It is evident that there is a widespread movement for the control of industry. It is a ragged movement, without any common direction. Those who are leading it or inspiring it are by no

<sup>1</sup> The result of this cannot yet be predicted. The decision of the Courts is being appealed against. In any case it is not possible to imagine the C.G.T. being permanently crushed.

means, as we have seen, in agreement about its final aims, nor even about the proper methods to employ. Those who are following—the vast mass of the Trade Unionists—have few if any theories at all about it. Nevertheless, if we look at the particular demands or actions in one trade or another, we find a pretty general unison among the mass and the leaders and the theorists. Collectivists, Guild Socialists and all but the most implacable doctrinaires among the revolutionaries, support the miners', the railway-men's or the builders' programmes. And in all these demands and actions we can detect plainly enough the stamp of a common purpose. That common purpose it is which makes the "new Trade Unionism." The Trade Unions have now acquired very far-reaching rights of interference in industry. They have established a variety of checks upon the autocracy of the employers—standard rates of wages, limitation of hours of work, rules relating to conditions in the workshops and factories, the employment of certain kinds of labour on certain jobs and so on. But all this means that their function in the industrial system is in essence a negative one. They have very little positive function in the sense of responsibility for the carrying on of production. It is towards that positive function that they are now advancing, by the encroachment of the workers on the actual management or

direction of their industries. The aim is thus clearly something beyond Whitley Councils; for a Whitley Council concedes nothing positive. It amounts to no more than a domestic conference, in which the master of the house consults with his servants about their interest and his own. They may as a result be more comfortable in the 'servants' hall,' and their work may go more smoothly; but they are still the servants, taking their orders and their dismissal from their master. The house is his.

But how is the control of industry to be won? What ought to be the strategy and the tactics of the 'Trade Union movement? Here is the cleavage between 'revolution' and 'evolution,' which has of late appeared in a sharper form. Direct action, as we have seen, has become enormously more popular since the war, from causes which are partly economic, partly political and partly psychological. But direct action manifestly has various shades of meaning, from an active strike policy to a complete organisation of the workers for a violent revolution. This latter conception has, of course, received its most powerful fillip from the Russian Bolsheviks. Their success has brought—or has seemed to bring—a catastrophic overthrow of bourgeois society into the realm of 'practical politics' throughout Europe.

It is impossible to discuss adequately here the desirability of bringing about a new social and industrial

order by a bloody upheaval under a dictatorship of the proletariat.<sup>1</sup> But in any case the prospect of achieving a successful revolution in this country seems decidedly remote. The Russian experiment has been a failure as well as a success. It is idle to deny that, however much it may be judged to be the misfortune rather than the fault of the Bolsheviks, their régime has produced a widespread disillusionment. If some can still be inspired by it, others are as definitely repelled, and many more remain indifferent. Abstract arguments will appeal to few; people who can swallow Marx or Lenin whole are born and not made. Neither their actual conditions nor their character predispose the British working classes to revolution. And even if it be argued that the few may be enough to sweep on the many, there still remains another thing needful. Unless the proletariat can dispose of military force, its chances are poor. The old notion, cherished by 'peaceful revolutionaries,' of ending capitalism by a sort of 'Pleasant Sunday Afternoon' general strike, is derided by the Bolsheviks, as it was derided long ago by the German Socialists who called it 'general nonsense.' The walls of Jericho certainly will not

<sup>1</sup> See *The Meaning of National Guilds*, by M. B. Reckitt and C. E. Bechhofer, for an attack on the Bolshevik policy, and *The Bolshevik Theory*, by R. W. Postgate, for a defence. Cf. also *Direct Action*, by W. Mellor.

fall merely because the workers 'fold their arms.' How then is the proletariat to dispose of armed force on the Revolution morning? The plan of sapping the allegiance of a professional Army and Navy by an insidious propaganda can hardly be taken seriously. It would be an interesting but somewhat lengthy task, likely to be handed on from generation to generation! One set of conditions perhaps might provide the opportunity, and that is the crisis of another great war. Some enthusiasts may be content to work—or wait—for that. The rest will remain sceptical about the Revolution.

Of course, this is not to say that all the shibboleths of the strictest sect of the constitutionalists are to be accepted, that all use of direct action is to be ruled out. Labour will undoubtedly continue to employ the strike—and even the general strike if the occasion demands it—for large as well as smaller ends, and there is no valid reason why it should not. But neither is there any reason why it should not use the 'political weapon.' It is not probable that a new heaven and a new earth will be created at Westminster; but the nationalisation of the coal mines or the railways, or shipping or banking, can be effected there. The public ownership of all these services and others, with democratic management, is a necessary step to the control of industry, and there is little doubt that it would, in fact, be as

welcome to most of the revolutionaries as to the constitutionalists. Moreover, it is possible through Parliament to check the power of capitalism on another side, by establishing a public regulation of prices or materials.

Parliamentary action, however, is not the only line of advance. There is the method of 'encroaching control' advocated by the Guild Socialists. This means a gradual transference of the functions and rights of the employers to the representatives of Labour. It implies that the organised workers, in the shop or mill or factory, should aim at extending their power over matters of management and discipline. It implies the policy of 'collective contract'—the substitution, that is, "as far as possible, for the present individual relationship of the employer to each worker, whom he, through his representatives, hires, fires, and remunerates individually, a collective relation to the employer of all the workers in the shop, so that the necessary labour is in future supplied by the Union, and the workers substitute their own collective regulations for 'hiring and firing' for those of the employer, and, whenever possible, enter into a collective contract with him to cover the whole output of the shop and themselves, according to their own Union regulations, apportion the work and share out the payment received."<sup>1</sup> Nor is there any reason

<sup>1</sup> Cole, *Guild Socialism Re-stated*, p. 199.

why the small administrative functions (*e.g.* in connection with insurance against unemployment and sickness) at present delegated by the State to the Trade Unions should not be considerably extended. In the sphere of technical education certain Unions have long had some advisory powers in respect of Trade Schools established by the Local Authorities. Why should not the Unions become themselves the responsible authorities for the training of the workers in their crafts? The enforcement of the Factory Acts, again, and the management of the Employment Exchanges might well be put into the hands of the Unions. All of this is practicable; it is the natural development of the tendency to workshop organisation or of the reaction against bureaucracy. It may sound less heroic than the propaganda of Revolution; but it may make the revolution a little less remote.

For, finally, if the organised workers are to succeed in supplanting the capitalist employer and the State official, they will have to fit themselves for their task. It is easy, and it is proper, to support the Trade Unions in their struggle for freedom. But the attainment of freedom, as we have said, means the attainment of power. Timid or embittered members of the middle classes cry out at the prospect of government passing into the hands of workmen "who are intelligent, very energetic, and intensely selfish."<sup>1</sup> It

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Outspoken Essays*, by Dean Inge.

may be said they are wrong in their fears, or that, if they are right, they do not deserve much sympathy. A century of greedy plutocracy, preceded by several centuries of oppressive aristocracy, could hardly be expected to produce a working class composed of angels. Yet clearly all of us, and not least the workers themselves, want something more than the assurance that the new democracy will not be worse than the old oligarchy. If Labour is to be efficient as well as free, it will have to translate its high ideals into practice. Not merely structural reforms, but discipline, knowledge and a wide outlook are vitally necessary. None but a fool supposes that the Trade Unions can be driven back into their old humble position of clubs of workmen fighting spasmodically over sixpences. The real alternative in the future, by whatever methods the transformation may be effected, is whether they shall be jealous corporations dominating society like the trusts of 'Big Business,' or organised 'professions,' co-operating to render service to the community.



# APPENDIX

## TRADE UNION MEMBERSHIP—1919-1920<sup>1</sup>

(From Ministry of Labour: *The Labour Gazette*, December 1920)

Trade Group.	No. of Unions at end of 1919.	Membership at end of 1919.		
		Males.	Females.	Total.
<b>Building:</b>				
Bricklayers and Masons .. .. .	12	66,884	—	66,884
Carpenters and Joiners .. .. .	2	151,525	—	151,525
Painters and Decorators .. .. .	8	71,568	—	71,568
Builders' Labourers .. .. .	9	103,587	—	103,587
Others .. .. .	37	42,113	24	42,137
<b>Mining and Quarrying:</b>				
Coal Mining .. .. .	96	1,027,558	6,666	1,034,424
Other Mining and Quarrying .. .. .	9	34,922	—	34,922
<b>Metal, Engineering and Shipbuilding:</b>				
Iron and Steel Manufacture .. .. .	12	143,391	1,782	145,173
Ironfounding, Engineering and Shipbuilding .. .. .	78	847,194	1,364	848,558
Other .. .. .	62	70,437	10,444	80,881
<b>Textile:</b>				
Cotton .. .. .	153	160,340	281,448	441,788
Woollen and Worsted .. .. .	29	42,423	84,477	126,900
Linen and Jute .. .. .	26	13,407	54,357	67,764
Hosiery .. .. .	12	7,338	25,440	32,778
Other Textile .. .. .	24	15,278	20,698	35,976
Textile Bleaching, Dyeing, Finishing, etc. .. .. .	30	76,444	27,450	103,894
<b>Clothing:</b>				
Boot and Shoe .. .. .	13	73,233	33,530	106,563
Tailoring and other Clothing .. .. .	25	43,706	111,951	155,657
<b>Transport:</b>				
Railway .. .. .	10	617,634	12,751	624,385
Tramway and other Road Transport .. .. .	18	222,503	346	222,849
Seafaring .. .. .	15	172,121	250	172,371
Dock, Canal and Riverside Labour .. .. .	26	112,149	1,153	113,302
<b>Agriculture and Fishing</b> .. .. .	15	199,219	3,397	202,616
<b>Paper, Printing and Allied Trades</b> .. .. .	29	131,674	60,760	192,434
<b>Woodworking and Furnishing:</b>				
Furnishing .. .. .	8	35,448	5,677	41,125
Coach Building .. .. .	5	48,683	—	48,683
Other .. .. .	30	36,665	624	37,289
<b>Pottery</b> .. .. .	6	15,427	24,950	40,377
<b>Chemical and Glass</b> .. .. .	30	22,195	3,364	25,559
<b>Food, Drink and Tobacco</b> .. .. .	29	55,668	7,652	63,320
<b>Leather</b> .. .. .	30	21,393	7,698	29,091
<b>Teachers</b> .. .. .	8	57,130	125,507	182,637
<b>Entertainments Workers</b> .. .. .	7	32,677	8,726	41,403
<b>Banking and Insurance</b> .. .. .	18	59,520	5,266	64,786
<b>Shop Assistants, Clerks, etc.</b> .. .. .	41	172,452	94,031	266,483
<b>Enginemen</b> .. .. .	16	54,525	67	54,592
<b>Miscellaneous</b> .. .. .	49	53,738	16,747	70,485
<b>General Labour</b> .. .. .	15	1,273,961	211,643	1,490,604
<b>Employees of Public Authorities<sup>2</sup></b> .. .. .	273	311,682	78,714	390,396
<b>TOTALS</b> .. .. .	1,315	6,694,812	1,328,219	8,023,761

<sup>1</sup> These figures are approximate. Some Unions, e.g., cannot state exactly their male and female membership. In the grand total of 8,023,761 are included 56,000 persons in foreign and colonial branches, mostly of the Engineers and the Joiners. There is also some duplication in the case of the Teachers. The net total is probably less than that shown above by between 5000 and 15,000, the vast majority of whom would be women.

<sup>2</sup> These figures do not include teachers, tramway workers and general labourers, who are included under "Teachers," "Transport" and "General Labour."

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# INDEX

ACCIDENT benefit, 122.  
 Agricultural Labourers' Union,  
 26.  
 Agricultural Labourers' Union,  
 National, 238.  
 Agricultural Wages Board, 72 *n*,  
 236.  
 Amalgamation, 194 ff, 237 ff.  
 American Trade Unions, 104 *n*,  
 114 *n*, 189 ff, 250.  
 Apprenticeship, 112 ff.  
 Arbitration, Compulsory, 87,  
 139, 145, 214, 218, 227 *n*.  
 Arch, Joseph, 26.  
 Ashley, Professor W. J., 86.  
 Australasia, industrial legislation  
 in, 139, 145, 146.

Beamers, Twisters and Drawers,  
 Amalgamated Association of,  
 56.  
 Beesly, Professor, 24.  
 Belgian Co-operative movement,  
 185, 186.  
 Belgian Trade Unions, 183 ff.  
 Bell, Richard, 32.  
 Benbow, William, 15.  
 Benefits, Trade Union, 121 ff.  
 Bevin, Ernest, 227 *n*.  
 Blast-furnacemen, wages of,  
 95 ff.  
 Boilermakers and Iron Ship-  
 builders, United Society of,  
 27 *n*, 52 *n*, 58, 95, 108, 113,  
 131, 205 *n*, 208, 238.  
 Bolshevism, 257 *n*, 276, 277.  
 Bolton Weavers, case of (1818),  
 8.  
 Boot and Shoe Operatives,  
 National Union of, 140.

*Bourses du Travail*, 177.  
 Boy labour, 115.  
 Breeches Makers' Benefit  
 Society, 3 *n*.  
 Bricklayers, Operative Society  
 of, 48 *n*, 93, 113 *n*, 207, 238.  
 Brushmakers, United Society of,  
 110.  
 Builders' Union, 13.  
 Building Guilds, 265 *n*, 269 ff.  
 Building Trades Operatives,  
 National Federation of, 65,  
 226.  
 Burns, John, 30, 32.  
 Butty system, 93.

Canada, Industrial Disputes In-  
 vestigation Act, 146.  
 Carpenters, wages of, 100.  
 Carpenters and Joiners, Amal-  
 gamated Society of, 21, 48 *n*,  
 49 *n*, 57 *n*, 59, 93, 194.  
 Carpenters and Joiners, Friendly  
 Society of Operative House,  
 12.  
 Carpenters and Joiners (General  
 Union of, 194.  
 Chartism, 18.  
 Christian Socialists, 21.  
 Christian Trade Unions, 167,  
 184.  
 Clyde strikes, 216.  
 Coal Commission, 221.  
 Coal Mines (Minimum Wage)  
 Act, 37, 138 *n*.  
 Coal Strike (1919), 220 ff.  
 Coal Strike (1920), 228.  
 Cole, G. D. H., 190, 191, 197,  
 210, 242, 279.  
 Collective Agreements, 135 ff.

- Combination Acts (1799 and 1800), 5 ff, 10, 11.  
 Compositors, London Society of, 40 n, 52, 53, 58, 110, 116 n, 122, 123, 124.  
 Conciliation Act (1896), 36, 137.  
 Conciliation Boards, 137 ff, 144.  
*Confédération Générale du Travail*, 175 ff, 233 n, 273.  
 Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act (1875), 26.  
 Coopers, London Society of, 9 n.  
 Co-operative Employees, 247 n.  
 Co-operative movement, 185, 186, 203, 204, 247, 262 n, 271.  
 Co-partnership, 79 ff, 253.  
 Cotton Spinners, Amalgamated Association of Operative, 55, 56, 122, 124.  
 Council of Action, 230 ff.
- Daily Herald, The*, 225.  
 Demarcation disputes, 118, 200.  
 Denmark, 139, 146 n, 202, 233 n.  
 Direct action, 180, 230 ff, 276 ff.  
 Dispute benefit, 124.  
 Dock Labourers, National Union of, 110.  
 Dock Strike, London (1889), 30.  
 Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Workers' Union, 30, 110.  
 "Dockers' Inquiry" (1920), 226; 227 n.  
 'Document, The,' 13.  
 Dorchester Labourers' case, 17.  
 Dublin lock-out (1913), 37, 67.
- Electrical Trades Union, 238.  
 "Encroaching Control," 279.  
 Engineering and Shipbuilding Draughtsmen, 236.  
 Engineering and Shipbuilding Federation, 64.  
 Engineering Union, Amalgamated, 57 n, 237, 244, 245.
- Engineers, Amalgamated Society of, 21, 27 n, 29, 50, 51, 58, 60, 66, 93, 113, 196, 208, 210, 237.  
 Fabian Society, 29.  
 Factory Acts, 133, 280.  
 Federation, 61 ff.  
 Finance of Trade Unions, 58, 59, 126 ff, 173, 176, 177, 195, 205.  
 Flint-Glass Makers' Friendly Society, 110.  
 French Trade Unions, 84, 85, 129, 174 ff, 273 ff.  
 Funeral benefit, 122.
- Gardeners' Association, British, 35.  
 Garment Workers, United, 239.  
 Gasworkers and General Labourers, National Union of, 30, 53, 54, 58, 124.  
 General Federation of Trade Unions, 35, 68, 69, 70, 201 ff.  
 General Labour Unions, 30, 65, 71, 195 ff, 215 n, 238, 242.  
 "General Staff" of Labour, 247 ff.  
 General Strike, 150, 160, 161, 233.  
 George, Henry, 29.  
 German Trade Unions, 166 ff, 193, 205, 271.  
 Gilds, Mediæval Craft, 1.  
 Gold, Silver and Kindred Trades, Amalgamated Society of, 60 n.  
 Grand General Union of the United Kingdom, 12, 13.  
 Grand National Consolidated Trades Union, 14 ff.  
 Guild Socialism, 260 ff, 279.
- Hardie, J. Keir, 32.  
 Harrison, Frederic, 24.  
 Hirsch-Puncker Unions, 167.  
*Hornby v. Closs*, case of, 23.  
 Hotel Employees' Union, 35.  
 Howell, George, 127.  
 Hughes, Tom, 24.  
 Hume, Joseph, 10.

Independent Labour Party, 32.  
Industrial Agreements Bill  
(1912), 148.

Industrial Courts Act, 227 *n*.

Industrial Revolution, 2, 3, 4.

Industrial Unionism, 60, 189 ff,  
240 ff.

Industrial Workers of the World,  
190 ff.

Insurance Acts, 34, 72 *n*, 88, 89,  
125, 128, 130, 131.

International Trade Union  
organisations, 248 ff.

Iron and steel trades, hours in,  
104 *n*.

Iron and steel trades, wages in,  
95 ff.

Ironfounders, Friendly Society  
of, 20, 27 *n*.

Ironmoulders, Scottish, 122.

Italian Trade Unions, 272.

Jaurès, J., 160.

Joint Board, 68.

Joint Industrial Councils. *See*  
Whitley Councils.

Jouhaux, L., 150, 151.

Labour Parties, local, 62, 231.

Labour Party, 32 ff, 45, 201 ff,  
217, 230, 247.

Labour Representation Com-  
mittee, 32, 39.

Le Chapelier Law (1791), 5.

Locomotive Engineers and Fire-  
men, Associated Society of,  
60 *n*, 223, 239.

MacArthur, Mary, 216.

Macdonald, Alexander, 22.

MacDonald, J. Ramsay, 148,  
149.

Mann, Tom, 30, 45, 191.

Master and Servant Acts, 22,  
23.

Metal Trades' Federation,  
British, 63.

Metalworkers' Union (Ger-  
many), 168, 169.

Miners' Federation of Great  
Britain, 57, 63, 198, 205 *n*,  
220 ff, 229 *n*, 268.

Miners, Lancashire and Cheshire  
Federation, 56, 57.

Miners' Nationalisation Bill,  
268 ff.

Miners' Permanent Relief  
Societies, 123.

Miners, Yorkshire, 132.

Munitions of War Acts, 214.

Murphy, J. T., 244.

National Association for the Pro-  
tection of Labour, 12, 13.

National Union of the Working  
Classes, 15.

New Zealand, 145, 146.

Non-Unionist question, 37, 237.

Normal working-day, 104 ff.

O'Connor, Fergus, 18.

Officials, Trade Union, 48 ff,  
168, 169, 206 ff, 242 ff.

Old Age Pensions, 131.

Osborne Judgment, 34, 40, 42 *n*.

Osborne, W. V., 40, 77.

Overtime, 105, 110.

Owen, Robert, 14 ff.

Parliamentary Committee of  
Trades Union Congress, 25 *n*,  
67, 201, 202, 203, 247.

Patternmakers, United King-  
dom Association of, 118,  
238.

Piece-work rates, 92 ff.

Place, Francis, 6, 7, 10, 11.

Plasterers' Operative Associa-  
tion, 238.

Plumbers' Operative Associa-  
tion, 118.

Pointsmen and Signalmen's  
Society, United, 60 *n*.

Political Action, 132 ff, 162 ff,  
172, 179, 278.

Potters, 109.

Printing and Kindred Trades'  
Federation, 64.



- Printing trades, wages in, 100 ff,  
 116 *n*, 120 *n*.  
 Profit-sharing. *See* Co-partner-  
 ship.  
 Railway Clerks' Association,  
 60 *n*, 224.  
 Railway Servants, Amalgamated  
 Society of, 38, 60 *n*.  
 Railway Strike (1919), 223 ff.  
 Railway Workers' Union,  
 General, 30, 60 *n*.  
 Railwaymen, National Union of,  
 54, 60 *n*, 61, 210, 211, 223,  
 229 *n*, 239, 240.  
 Railwaymen, National Union of  
 (of France), 176 *n*, 181.  
 Referendum, 48, 49.  
 Reformist Trade Unions in  
 France, 181.  
 Russian Trade Unions, 240, 277.  
 Sabotage, 180.  
 Saddlers, 110.  
 Sailors' and Firemen's National  
 Union, 30, 65.  
 Sankey Report, 221.  
 Scientific management, 107, 253.  
 Sheffield cutlery trades, 114.  
 Sheffield rattening, 23.  
 Sheffield Scissor-grinders, case  
 of, 8.  
 Ship Stewards and Cooks,  
 National Union of, 35, 65.  
 Shipwrights, 118, 238.  
 Shipyard Agreement, 136.  
 Shop Assistants, National Union  
 of, 35, 239.  
 Shop Stewards, 217, 242 ff, 255.  
 Short time, 111.  
 Sick benefit, 122.  
 Silk Hatters, 104.  
 Six Acts, The (1819), 10.  
 Sliding scale, 95 ff.  
 Smith, Adam, *Wealth of  
 Nations*, 4.  
 Snowden, Philip, 143.  
 Social Democratic Federation,  
 29.  
 Socialism, 29, 31, 256.  
 South Metropolitan Gas Com-  
 pany, 80 *n*, 81, 82 *n*, 84 *n*.  
 Speeding-up, 107.  
 Spitalfields Acts (1765 and  
 1773), 4.  
 Standard Rate, 91 ff.  
 Steam Engine Makers' and Mill-  
 wrights', Journeymen, Friendly  
 Society, 12, 18 *n*, 48 *n*.  
 Strikes, 6 *n*, 20, 36, 37, 141,  
 142, 145, 150 ff, 170, 173,  
 180, 216, 220 ff, 276 ff.  
 Stone Masons, Friendly Society  
 of Operative, 18 *n*, 19 *n*, 20,  
 48 *n*, 49, 93, 94, 207, 238.  
 Superannuation benefit, 123.  
 Sweden, 161.  
 Sympathetic Strikes, 159.  
 Syndicalism, 14, 45, 150, 166,  
 174 ff, 257 ff.  
 Taff Vale Judgment, 33, 38.  
 Tailors and Tailoresses, Amal-  
 gamated Society of, 21, 239.  
 Textile Factory Workers' As-  
 sociation, United, 65.  
 Textile Trades' Federation,  
 Northern Counties, 65.  
 Textile trades, wages in, 117 *n*.  
 Tillet, Ben, 30.  
 Time-rates, 92 ff.  
*Times*, printers, case of (1810), 7.  
 Tobacco Workers' Federation,  
 63 *n*.  
 Trade Boards, 71, 72, 133, 134,  
 162.  
 Trade Disputes Act, 33, 39.  
 Trade Union Act (1871), 25,  
 38.  
 Trade Union Act (1913), 34, 42,  
 43.  
 Trade Union Act Amendment  
 Act (1876), 41.  
 Trade Unionism, distribution of,  
 70, 71.  
 Trade Unionism, origins,  
 Trade Unionism, growth of,  
 71 ff, 235 ff.

- Trade Unionism and the State, 88, 89, 280.  
Trades Councils, 22, 31, 62, 171, 231.  
Trades Union, 113, 13.  
Trades Union Congress, 24, 25, 32, 66, 67, 171, 201 ff., 247 ff.  
Transport Workers' Federation, 64, 195, 198, 229 n.  
Transport Workers' Union, Irish, 37.  
Transvaal, Industrial Disputes Prevention Act, 147.  
Triple Alliance, 229.  
Typographical Association, 116 n.  
Unemployment benefit, 123, 128, 131 n.  
Victoria, wages in, 106, 134.  
Wages Board, 134.  
Wages Fund Theory, 20, 112.  
Weavers, Amalgamated Association, 56, 123.  
Webb, Sidney and Beatrice, 26, 56, 99, 113 n., 201, 208, 260 n.  
Whitley Councils, 218, 253, 276.  
Williams, Aneurin, 81, 82, 83.  
Wilson, Havelock, 32.  
Women in Trade Unions, 72, 73, 116, 117, 215, 239, 282.  
Women Workers, National Federation of, 72, 215.  
Women's Trade Union League, 72.  
Workmen's Compensation Act, 122, 133.

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